the watermark

volume xii

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volume xii

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editor's note

As editor, I've been working with my staff on a re-vision of The Watermark. Our first fall issue came out last sememster, and we've expanded this issue to include an alumni section. As with anything, my hope is make The Watermark better than it was.

None of this would have been possible without the support of a number of people, too many to mention here by name. My tireless staff, the invaluable facutly here, and my wonderful friends have all been involved with the making of this issue. But I would be remiss if I didn't thank some people by name: Joseph Carroll of the Bernard Toale Gallery for judging the Art Award, and the Art Department and Nancy Stieber for funding it; Chet Frederick for judging and lending his name to the Chet Frederick Fiction Award; Mark Pawlak for judging the Poetry Award; the Creative Writing Department for funding the Fiction and Poetry Awards; Askold Melnyczuk for his support and advice, vision and therapy sessions; Adnan Usman, Tristan Lowe and the Undergraduate Student Senate; Caroline Coscia and the Graduate Student Assembly; Chancellor Keith Motley and Vice Chancellor Charlie Titus for their encouragement; Michael Sullivan of The Joiner Center; David Johnson for graciously allowing us to run his poem; the alumni who have supported our new Alumni Section; Franz Wright for his generosity in speaking with us; Jessica Santiccioli and Harry Gardner for their feedback and company; Donna Neal and the Student Life staff for all their help; and everyone who submitted this year and in the past.

Special thanks to Emily Taranto-Kent for again providing us with a beautiful cover – her other pieces can be found on pages 79 and 80.

We apologize to Ludmilla Gomes, whose piece Sunlight was printed under a different artist's name last semester. It can be found on page 90.

To my staff: thank you, thank you, thank you. You have made putting together this issue more fun than this much work should be. Those of you who are graduating, congratulations - and you'll be missed deeply here. We've started something truely wonderful together, and I look forward to continuing it next year.

Erica Mena
March 2005

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acknowledgements

Rebecca Warner's poems printed with permission of
Orchises Press

Franz Wright's poems printed with permission of
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poetry

Natalia Cooper

calico

those colors are
unmistakable

where do they make you
trees, swamps, trunk, leaves, water
where do they change you
from one organic thing to another

where does the blood begin
desert, cave, redrock, dry grass
what is the taste of the dust
from forgotten bones

those colors are
a collage of the broken

continents of green and darker
green

the most forgettable color
of them all is the
stickiest red dark shape

that color is the color of
the return to the forgotten

Kristina England

Covenant

Wearing our rolled plaid skirts up to milk thighs,
we commune in the Java Hut on
Webster Square, press our bony knees against
the tawny rug as we kneel before
crowded tables, cup our hands around clay-
baked mugs, hold our silence so we can taste
the sweet bread each poet has to offer
(dry manna on our tongues). Slam after
slam, a young man frosts a window with his
breath and writes with yellow fingernails:
Poetry has come with outstretched palms
but we adorn her with our stigmata.

Boxed Memories

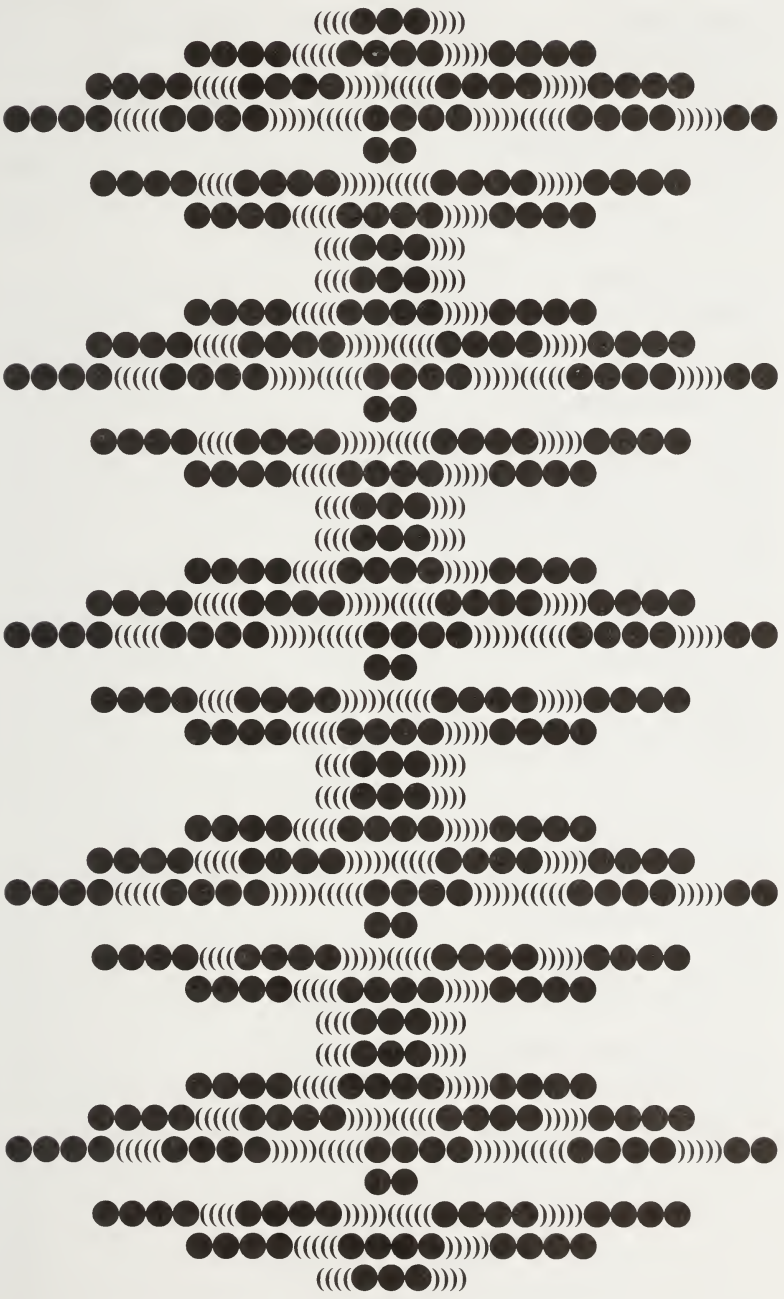
God's in the attic,
beneath cat toys and love notes.
And hell is there too.

Memoir

Kitchen – these blue tile floors
dissolve into seas, drowning
me into a mermaid's grave.
The mother ship does not drop
anchor but keeps hauling
through the waves.

Nathan Horowitz

Melody To Call Helping Spirits



Michael Niland

My Conspicuous Absence from Dave's Burial

Chilled bones
crammed St. Andrew's pews,
snapping and cracking
like arthritic joints,
from the white lilied altar
to cold, holy water basins
between arched doorways.

Local 106 brothers,
harder than their nails,
wept tributes.
Uncles mythologized
your enforcer past into
yarns of young mischief.
Laughter rattled stained glass
depictions of Christ's benedictions
and my conscience.
"Rectification came later,
not too late,"
old Father Gilmore belched
to the black flock.
(Remember his gin breath
stinking our First Communion,
tearing our eyes?)

I didn't stay today,
contrary to etiquette,
but Amazing Grace dragged,
stopped repeatedly so
family could re-prop
your broken wife.

University training debunks
extensions. Bone cancer
overpowers prayer.
Dead is dead.

Thump, thump, thump, thump…
Catholic rearing counterjabs;
it had rooted first, deep,
stretching, winding,
binding atoms.
Maybe you were watching,
recording cemetery attendees
with quill and parchment,
noting the unclosed ring around
your mahogany coffin and
the mound of freshly thawed
dirt.

If you were, please Dave,
remove your brass knuckles.
Guilt will amply punish.

Lőrinc Szabó translated by Benjamin Janos

One's Dreams

Because you are one way and they another,
And he has other interests,
And the truth is an attitude,
Or a formulation,
And because nothing outside interests me,
And because you can't win over the masses,
And because the rules were all written
Without me:
The time will finally come
To get away from among all of you.

Why do I still wait, peaking
At the future humbly?
Time is running out, and what is living
Always knows the truth.
You or I—one of us is sick,
Still, should I look at the weapons
To find out if it is love or hate
That approaches me?
If I only try to understand you,
Where does that leave me?

No! No! I can no longer stand
to be a mere straw in this crazed haystack;
To understand and respect the guard,
To feel pain with him if it hurts!
He who could stand it has long ago removed
Himself and walks between daggers
and across knives.
There are two of us, the world and I;
Like the prisoner in a cage,
to me I am the most important.

We also escape; my soul, the lock is opening,
Reason escapes
But carefully paints itself
with appearance's bars.
Inside, one, which outside is one thousand pieces!
Where did he go, who saw the fish,
If the net remains

Az egy Álmai

Mert te ilyen vagy s ők olyanok
És neki az érdeke más
S az igazság edegállapot
Vagy megfogalmazás
S mert kint nem tetszik semmi sem
S mer győzni nem lehet a tömegen
S ami szabály, mind nélkülem
Született:
Ideje volna végre már
Megszöknöm közületek.

Mire várjak még tovább, a jövőt
Lesve alázatosan?
Fut as idő, és ami él,
Annak mind igaza van.
Én vagy ti, egyikünk beteg;
És mégse nézzem a fegyvereket,
Hogy szeretet vagy gyűlölet
Közelit-e felém?
Ha mindig csal megértek,
Hol maradok én?

Nem! Nem! nem bírok már bolond
Szövevényben lenni szál;
Megérteni és tisztelni az őrt
S vele fájni, ha fáj!
Aki bírta, rég kibogozta magát
S megz tőrök közt és tőrökön át.
Ketten vagyunk, én és a világ,
Ketrecben a rab,
Mint neki ő, magamnak én
Vagyok a fontosabb.

Szökünk is, lelkem, nyílik a zár,
Az értelem szökik,
De magára festi gondosan
A látszat rácsait.
Bent egy, ami kint ezer darab!
Hol járt, ki látta a halat,
Hogyha a háló megmaradt

Untouched?
Prohibition? Another prohibits it! A crime?
For them, if it is proved.

Inside of us, inside, there is no detail and border;
Nothing is forbidden;
We are only ourselves, each of us isolated,
Neither good nor bad.
Hide deep within yourself! There
Lies still some kind of forgotten
Dream, large and free, like
Our mothers, the endless
Sea, as a memory appears
In the acid of our blood and tears.

Back to the sea, to inside ourselves!
Only there can we be free!
The Many no longer grants us
Anything that is outside.
We compromise with the masses if we must—
True—as ash falls apart;
Our home is the One, which
Doesn't share;
Let's dream back, if we still can,
The One's dreams!

Sértetlenül;
Tilalom? Más tiltja' Bűn? Nekik,
S ha kiderül!

Bennünk, bent, nincs részlet s határ,
Nincs semmi tilos;
Mi csak mi vagyunk, egy-egy magány,
Se jó, se rossz.
Rejtőzz mélyre, magadba! Ott
Még rémlik valami elhagyott
Nagy és szabad álom, ahogy
Anyánk, a végtelen
Tenger, emlékként, könnyeink
S vérünk savában megjelen.

Tengerbe, magunkba, vissza! Csak
Ott lehetünk szabadok!
Nekünk többé semmit sem ad
Ami kint van, a Sok.
A tömeggel alkudni ha kell,
Az igaz, mint hamu porlik el;
A mi hazánk az Egy, amely
Nem osztozik:
Álmodjuk hát, ha még lehet,
Az Egynek álmait!

Tanya Boroff

Along the South Service Highway

In a rented Chrysler
Sebring convertible, wearing red
heels and an empire
waist, my hair in curls twisted
high and sprayed to polished
perfection, photograph-
ready, on the way to your wedding
where I will drink two
too many glasses of wine before I walk
down the aisle before
you dressed in white even
while the crowd whispers inside
the function hall on Sunset
Boulevard in Davie, Florida, where you moved
to get away from the whispers–yet
here I am, wearing wine
colored shoes and a matching dress,
holding the silk flowers you chose
because they won't die on the drive back up 95,
after I leave the sun and the sight
of you and the bottle
of wine I drank too fast before I went straight
from the hall to Miami
Beach to the Elbow
Room to sing karaoke with men
I don't know, wearing way too much
blush and not enough
clothes in the summer heat
of November when I should have stayed
sober but instead I drove
back down 595 to University Drive and turned
right on the South Service Highway
with red blisters on my toes from dancing
all night in bare feet pretending
it wasn't winter where I live.

Night Moves

One night, I drove down Cedar Street, past
your house, and the lights were out
in the room above the garage, the room
with the red wine
stain on the wall above
the bed, at least where the bed was
when the red wine left
the stain on the wall beside the window I couldn't see
inside as I drove down
Cedar Street just a little after
midnight on a Friday in October when it was still
warm enough to drive after midnight
with the window down. I was listening
to Bob Segar, hoping
no one would know I was
driving alone with a learner's permit in the middle
of the night with a broken
tail light and an inspection sticker that expired
long before the red wine
left the stain on the white wall beside the navy blue
curtains on the window that was dark when I drove by
that night after I drank what was left
of the bottle that I'd stolen from the wine rack
in my father's basement. As I drove, I wondered
if there was someone in the room behind
the window who could hear me playing
Segar songs too loud to be
playing in October on a Friday after
midnight as I drove past
your house on Cedar Street and turned
the volume up, even though I knew
no one would ever know
I was there.

David Johnson

Dark and Darkness

*
The dark above me
lifts me.
The dark below me
keeps the light
inside me
when I rise.

*
The dark part
of myself
is outside me
asleep
in the
black grass.

*
The dark doesn't
have a voice.
You have a voice.
When you sing,
silence becomes
the dark.

*
The darkness
in my sex
is the shadow
I kiss
while I sleep.

*
The two shadows
of darkness
are a river
and a field.
If the field
is dry,
the river's dry.

*

When I touch
the ground,
it's as dark
as the sky
above my hands.

*

She told me
darkness comes
from my body.
When I touch
her body,
I close
my eyes.

*

The desert's brightness
lights the city
and the trees.
The brightness stays,
the darkness stays.

*

I believe
in the saving grace
of darkness
and light.
What I believe alone
won't save me.

*

Whenever
she's beside me,
I want her naked.
When I'm naked
beside her,
she wears
the darkness
between us.

*

The stars
are the slow
mirrors of stars
that went dark
before I was born.
Their light
is more mine
than theirs.

*

I want
to know the earth
so I can know
the darkness
that touches me,
and then forget it.

*

Whenever a woman
I don't know
smiles at me,
for a moment
our mouths meet
in the dark.

*

The darkness
in my brother's joy
is my father's pain.

*

I want to see
the brightness
inside the dark
roots of trees,
but I can't.
It doesn't
belong to me.

*

We leave ourselves
and wander around
in darkness.
When we return,
we bring the darkness
with us.

*

Every day
I walk outside
to see the sun
set into
the darkness
of an enormous
patience.

*

The joy
in our lives
is made
by all of the
darkness in
the world,
and the world
sees it.
We never see
the world.

*

I want
to touch
the darkness
inside her
just below
her sex.
If I can
do that,
I'm alive,
because she is.

*

I believe
I was blind
because I never
noticed the shadows
of bees
on dark afternoons.
I could
have been blind.

*

I see
the darkness
across from me,
and I'm
apart
from it.
I see
the darkness
next to me,
and I'm
a part
of it.
But I'm
a part
of everything.

*

To be ready
is to love darkness
and light,
and know it.

T. E. Olivieri

To Her, Whom I Owe Everything

My Sallie Mae, too businesslike for love,
To you I owe the labors of my prime.
I owe you more than I owe God above.
Thus far I've regularly paid on time.
So why did you convict me Sallie Mae,
Throw me behind jail walls too steep to climb?
My wanton, why insist that I must pay?

You scorn me Sallie Mae. I'm not surprised:
I shouldn't have agreed to your demands.
My ventures aren't completely subsidized,
And always will be tethered in your bands,
Which no one but you fully understands.
If I had never stumbled in your way,
My life, my soul, would still be in my hands.
My wanton, why insist that I must pay?

You keep me as a kept-man bound in chains:
I am in your thrall, forever to you bound.
Don't take from me what dignity remains
Or treat me like a stray dog whom you found,
Who should be grateful that he was not drowned,
Who you can tell to fetch and must obey.
Don't run your loyal dog into the ground.
My wanton, why insist that I must pay?

Where is the patron who will pay my debt
And my exacting mistress put at bay?
For what I owe, she never will forget,
My wanton, who insists that I must pay.

Danny Diamond

Set and Setting

1.
I don't want to meet you on a narrow Copley subway car
where impatient strangers suck
my breath. There are no footprints in the sidewalks
to get me home from your apartment. The looming light

of phosphorous towers licks at a laminated moon.
I don't want to drown in the fish-stick stench
of Boston Harbor on a calm and stagnant
evening. I don't want to wade through wide

rivers of cars just to join the crowd at the Commons,
where your voice is muted by motorcades of any-
hour Boston traffic. Besides, the roads there are untying themselves
like Titanic's strained and fraying cables.

2.
I want to lean against your back on a cold salt beach
and feel your lungs pressing against mine
while the layered late-afternoon wind stacks oceans
of blue sky blowing against the tide.

I want to wait until the spotlight moon marks its cue,
and lead a dance of shallow footprints;
waltzing to the soft snare
of syncopated waves.

The beach is a fine place to forget. It is overflowing
with darkness. Beyond the stillest
slate-black sea, we can watch the smokestack lights of Boston
sink into the North Atlantic.

Brooks Winchell

Wallet

Tough thing that leather,
The shining softness of my wallet
As I flip it open
And thumb through – the corners
All rounded and dull.

I've become proficient,
Leafing cash between my fingers
Like pages, and pulling, and filing,
And stuffing it back in my pocket.

Maybe I'm the business,
Or the unconscious, or the man
Who stands behind me
Tapping his foot and trying not to look
Impatient. 'Here' I want to say
Handing him my wallet,
'You can have it.'

César Vallejo translated by Brooks Winchell

Black Stone on a White Stone

I will die in Paris with torrents,
On a day that I've already remembered.
I will die in Paris – and I'm not worried –
Perhaps on a Thursday, like today, in the autumn.

Thursday it will be, because today, Thursday,
As I inscribe these verses, my forearms have
Weakened, and never before have I felt myself,
On all of this road, so completely alone.

César Vallejo is dead, they used to beat him,
All without reason – he did nothing to them;
They hit him hard with a stick and hard

Also with a rope; his testimonies
Are the days of Thursday and the bones in his arms,
The loneliness, the rain, the roads…

Piedra Negra Sobre Una Piedra Blanca

Me moriré en Paris con aguacero;
un día del cual tengo ya el recuerdo.
Me moriré en Paris – y no me corro –
tal vez un jueves, como es hoy, de otoño.

Jueves será, porque hoy, jueves, que proso
estos versos, los húmeros me he puesto
a la mala y, jamás como hoy, me he vuelto,
con todo mi camino, a verme solo.

César Vallejo ha muerto, le pegaban
todos sin que él les haga nada;
le daban duro con un palo y duro

también con una soga; son testigos
los días jueves y los huesos húmeros,
la soledad, la lluvia, los caminos…

fiction

Jay Cole

Release

MORGAN SAID "SURE" when I asked her to dance with me. So I put down the oven-mitt and lifted her off the kitchen counter. I propped her five-year-old frame onto my hip and we began to sway along the hardwood floors of the kitchen. The rhythm through the speakers above the sink soon locked our hips into the song. "Is this a kissing song?" she asked. I told her that it was. She smiled in response, wrapping one arm around the small of my back and the other around my neck. It was perfect.

So perfect that it soon brought me back to the day, eight years earlier, when my father reached for my sister's hand on her wedding day. *So perfect* that I was now reliving that moment all over again: his long bow before her and the way she smiled, half-embarrassed, before rising to her feet; the look on his face; the way he twirled her in circles on the dance-floor. My sister was radiant during that song. It was perfect. I remember.

And it was during that moment that she seemed to accept him as our father. *Our father!* The rebellious man of harsh drunkenness and stubborn judgment—the man we never understood—the man who was never there for us...until that song, that is, that one wedding song, which seemingly brought them together for the first time ever. And I began to wonder if there was something in those twirls that helped her to understand why he left us when we were only kids. Did those twirls help her to understand why he was never there for us during those tough adolescent years? And why was he, at the age of fifty, now present, looking to dance with her on her one fine day? Was there some form of forgiveness in those twirls?

Well, if not, then why in the hell would she ever let him dance with her on her wedding day?

Ahh! but it was the look on their faces as they embraced—a look the rest of the family waited years to see. It was a look indeed! A look that seemed to unharness all the years of built-up resentment and bitterness between them. It was a look that seemed to bring togetherness on a day reserved for release.

My daughter, Morgan, asked me why I was crying. I told her. She dropped her head onto my shoulder. She asked about who her grandfather was. I told her I was sorry she'd never get a chance to meet him. She asked if he was a nice man and I told her he was on the day he danced with his daughter. She smiled as her toes brushed my kneecaps. I kissed the top of her head. She looked up to see tears forming in my

eyes. I didn't try to hide them. She reached to wipe them away and I let her. She asked me why I was sad. "I miss not having a father," I said. She looked puzzled. "It doesn't have to be that way with us," I said. She seemed to understand what I meant by that.

Natalia Cooper

The Cigarette

EVERY DAY she waited for those last twenty steps. Up through the MBTA station, through the turnstiles, then down those last twenty steps and out to the reserves of sand and parking lot full of pigeon shit and the smell of stray cats. At the top of the stairs Mary lit her cigarette with a pack of humiliated matches, the flint strip just barely there, just enough so that after two or three tries a spark would fly out and the smell of sulfur filled her face.

It was the reward for another hard day's work: the exalted perfume of burning tobacco and chemicals wafting up through her tired nostrils, staining her teeth and breath. If her children knew she allowed herself this one guilty pleasure after long days of fetching charts and dealing with idiots who had stuck forks into toasters...well, if they only knew. Let's just say they would not be pleased.

In fact, they may have even been disgusted by her continued habit. The kids had always hated Mary's smoking. They would plug up their noses if it was in the house, violently roll down windows and sigh loudly if it was in the car. But those days were no longer.

Franklin, her youngest and slowest child, had finally moved out two years, five months, and eight days ago. Mary had hoped for that day for such a long time. Then when it finally arrived, she started counting the days since he left her. Franklin was the last piece of the life Mary had created. Mary could hold onto those remembered moments from Franklin's boyhood, shuffle through Polaroids and memories, and look back at his boyhood with some sense of accomplishment. Now all that was left was the residue of those days and the things the kids didn't want anymore.

Anna was on her second husband, welfare, and her fifth kid. When Anna was little she was always the caretaker. She had created doll hospitals, fashioning old style tourniquets from discarded broom handles, casts out of toilet paper, and eye patches from old socks. She was always the kid who helped the other kids learn how to read and write letters and numbers, but now Anna was the one who always needed assistance. But not from Mary anymore; the government had become like a surrogate mother to Anna. And just as she had done to Mary years before, Anna drained the subsidies until they ran dry.

Anna's WIC subsidy stopped being accepted at the local store after they caught her oldest kid Shelley stealing bubble gum from the back shelves when she was supposed to be going to use the bathroom.

Now Anna and her five kids had to drive a few miles away to get their groceries. They sputtered along in their old orange Ford Fairmont because the family had been blacklisted by all merchants who were closeby.

But Mary didn't care about any of that now. All that mattered was this one cigarette; this one beautiful Benson & Hedges Ultra Light 100. She would pretend it was a different kind of cigarette sometimes, maybe a daintier one: a Capri or a Virginia Slim. Other times she would imagine it was one of the manliest cigarettes there was: a Marlboro Red or a Pall Mall. The kind of cigarette a soldier would smoke in the trenches in a time of war. Or the kind a man would light up after a bar fight with the blood still there on his lips, subtly staining the filter between drags.

'Why not?' Mary thought to herself. 'Why not smoke the cigarettes of soldiers?' Her life was like a war: a series of pointless battles, systems of trenches that just smelled of rotting things and dying babies. Isn't that one of the foremost things people say about war...or at least about the men who fight it? Babykiller?

Mary had killed a few babies herself, but not on purpose, not with guns or shells or H-bombs, just with her own body.

It was a miracle that she had given birth to a child that lived to be more than two years. First, the doctors said she would never have a baby grow to term. Then after the first one lived to take a breath, they said her womb was toxic: that her body couldn't produce the right nutrients. But Mary knew God would bless her with the strength of body to have one or two, maybe even three babies.

Franklin was one of the weakest infants she had seen, and that's saying a lot; the woman went into labor seven times in her life. Three of the babies had been stillborn, the other two didn't even live to a year between the both of them. But Anna and Franklin both made it somehow, the most barebones definition of making it you can find. Shocked the doctors into silence, those two did.

And they almost killed Mary in the process, which honestly would've been alright with Mary except that if either of those babies had survived after killing Mary...well, let's just say that Mary knew if she had gone with the Lord in either case, those babies would eventually end up with Agnes O'Connor. She knew because by the time the babies started surviving, Mary knew, she just knew, that her husband Joseph wasn't going to live past fifty, and he was forty-seven when the first one was born.

Agnes O'Connor was a nice enough woman, but she had no business raising babies. Still, the good Lord was willing to take a chance on her and blessed her with six children: four girls and two boys. Mary could never imagine what it must've been like to grow up in that woman's house.

Mary heard plenty about it when she married Agnes' eldest child, Joseph. The stories Joseph told, the way he had wholeheartedly abandoned the church, the way he cringed when Agnes was around him...all those things kept Mary alive to take care of her children. Especially after Joseph's accident, then later after his death.

But no matter what Agnes O'Connor said or did, Mary was alive now. She was smoking her cigarette slowly and thinking about every single particle of smoke and chemicals that were pouring into her lungs. She was smiling wide now and to look at her at that moment, you'd think the woman never had a spot of pain in her whole life. The way she smiled as the smoke slowly worked its way around her wrinkled cheeks, her green eyes, and her clay-mud colored hair, you'd have thought she was blessed or something.

But soon Mary would have to go home to the one-family house with a rotting roof and sagging shutters where Agnes lived. Mary lived there now, too. Hey, when you marry someone you marry into a family. Even if the mother of the man you married is so sour and bitter even her biological children won't come to see her except on church holidays. A wife is a wife, is a daughter-in-law, has duties. Mary happened to stand by hers that was all.

So she walked down the metal-edged concrete steps of the MBTA station slowly, holding the railing. Sometimes, Mary wished she could just let go of the railing. Wished that a grain of sand on the bottom of her shoe would get caught in a scarred step just so and send her face-first down the steep staircase.

But she kept holding on, hoping that she would make it up to heaven someday to meet her Joseph again. Suicides went to hell, and even if Mary made it look like a fall, there's no fooling God. Besides, what would Agnes do without her? And really, at this point, what would she do without Agnes?

Yvette Fernandes

The Lady in the Wall

I HEARD HER wheezing next to me and waited for the light to go on and burn my eyes. It never went on. Instead she pulled back the blankets and slid to the floor. For eight nights, my sister would slide from the bed, tugging on the fitted sheet and rappel to the floor. 'Sario crawled to the wall at the foot of our bed and watched the water stain grow.

Rosario's asthma didn't bother me so much as when she would choose to wheeze. Every time she didn't get her way, she would start wheezing and get whatever she wanted out of pity. Mama couldn't yell at her in the store, even when she was being bad and touching stuff. 'Sario would start wheezing and all the ladies in the store would stare, suck their teeth and mutter "aye pobrecita." I wouldn't mind all that wheezing if she was skinny like me, then I could have worn all her pretty dresses and listened to her wheeze all day. I couldn't figure out why she chose the middle of the night to start wheezing. No one was around, except me, and I didn't have nothing to give her.

It rained every night for over a week, and the stain grew bigger until it was a soggy lump in the wallpaper. 'Sario said the Lady was in the wall, I said she was faking just like her wheezing. Mama didn't pay any attention when she told her about the Lady. Mama just told her to "sleep when she's supposed to sleep."

I knew 'Sario told the catechism lady about the wall when it started happening. One Sunday afternoon, the old lady came to our house after the Masses and told Mama something about our room. I couldn't hear everything 'cause I wasn't going near her; she's creepy with her bright pink lips, big gray hair and fake black eyebrows. I stayed away from the catechism lady ever since she told me I was going to Hell. I still don't know why she yelled at me. I didn't do nothing. Then Mama put me on punishment 'cause some lady told me I was going to Hell. Mama wasn't too crazy about her either. I know that because Mama didn't offer her nothing when she came over. The next day, Padre Paolo came over and went in our room. I don't know what happened, but whatever it was made Mama cry. Ever since that day, Mama didn't go to church, except for weddings and funerals, and I wasn't going since the old lady told me I was going to Hell.

Anyways, every time a car passed by 'Sario's shadow grew on the closet door and made her look like she was standing up. I wonder if her knees ever hurt or got dents from the nubby carpet embedded in

them. Every time she got out of bed in the middle of the night, I couldn't go back to sleep. So I'd wait for her to be done staring or whatever she did and pretend to sleep. Sometimes I thought she was right and the Lady was in the wall. I knew 'Sario was crazy, but if she was right I wanted to know and that night I kept my eyes open.

The rain dripped down our walls in dark streams making pictures. I squinted at the stain, trying to see something that looked anything like the Lady like my crazy sister described. I rolled over to watch the dark streaks on the wall when I noticed Sario's pillow smelled like cookies and Mama's expensive shampoo. I flipped her pillow over and put my warm one on her side of the bed. The wind blew a piece of trash between the buildings and cast a shadow on the wall like a giant bird. I rolled back over to look out the window when the wall got too scary to watch. Crazy 'Sario was still staring at the stupid stain.

I looked hard at her to see what the shiny thing was on her face. Then another shiny line ran from her cheek to her jaw. I wondered what she was crying about and asked her, but she didn't answer or even turn her head. I hated when she played deaf. I thought it was just a reflection of the water on the window; I didn't think she was sniffling, but just practicing her wheezing and staring at the water stain.

I rolled on my back and pretended to sleep, when I noticed something funny and cold in the room. I stayed as still as I could and watched if she felt cold too. The shiny lines on 'Sario's cheeks were gone, but that crazy girl was still staring at the wall. The passing headlights of a car reflected on her shiny black hair, but the shadow on the closet door didn't shrink like it normally did when the car passed the window. Instead, the shadow just changed shape and I looked back to the window, but nothing was going by.

The shadow lingered and grew across the ceiling to the Lady wall. My eyes opened wide hoping for it to go away. I know I screamed for Mama, but the words didn't come. Even though I felt light, my arms were too heavy to turn on the light or bang on the wall separating our room from Mama's. That night, I know I saw the Lady in the stain; 'Sario was right. I felt my eyes stretched wide open and I tried to lift my head to see her better, but could only see the rain slide down the window and the pale outline of feet in the stained wallpaper. The weight in my chest wouldn't let me breathe and I wheezed for Mama, God, mi vida, until there was no breath left to wheeze.

I tried to see Mama sleeping in her bed, but only saw my sister on the floor smiling at the wall. I knew Mama was sleeping across her bed, with magazines and pillows stacked on Papa's side of the bed. I couldn't see her, but I knew she was there, dreaming about the days when Papa was still alive and she was still foxy enough to get whistles.

Papa says someday I'll see better; clear like he can now, it just takes time.

Mama don't know Papa is still around and that he does whistle at her even though she don't look too foxy wearing all those black clothes. Mama don't know I'm still around when she hugs herself and rocks back and forth crying for me. We try to show her we're still here, but she don't see when we hide and put her keys back. When we tickle her to make her laugh, she just scratches. We put purple flowers in the cracks near the stoop, she just walks by.

The Lady isn't in the wall anymore. It rained so much that the stained paper stripped away from the wall and washed her away with it. Each night, my sister lays silently in the bed, using my old pillow on top of hers. Every once in a while, 'Sario whispers, "I'm sorry I asked her to take you, I was only joking." She don't have to wheeze or pray no more; but that don't matter now, she gets whatever she wants anyways.

Melissa Jeltsen

Losing Touch

IT WAS THE SPRING of Rhiannon's eleventh birthday when they got the birds. Rhiannon lived in the long house at the end of Chester Street. The house stood deep off the road, on top of a slight hill. Around the back was a hidden porch, with old armchairs and a wooden table.

Rhiannon spent most of her time playing by herself. Her parents were busy with the new baby, her younger sister Phoebe. Her brother was older, and he was too busy for her too. So she learned to play on her own. Her father still told her stories, and this was one thing she looked forward to. He knew lots about the world, and fascinated her with his tales.

The evenings that spring were exceptionally rainy. One late April night, the rain toppled down heavy on the house. Rhiannon lay in bed and imagined the raindrops. The wind wisped outside her window, emulating voices. She let her imagination go with the rush of power outside.

The next day was a languid Saturday that left Rhiannon and her brother slumped in front of the television. Rhiannon's mother was breast-feeding in the back room. Rhiannon wanted to talk to her mother, but instead sat quietly in the living room. Rhiannon was drawing with pastels—a line on the page started a shape, and then became an expanded form. Through the window they heard a yell.

"Kids! Come out here."

When they scurried out the door and down the steps, they saw their father standing in the far back of the yard. Past the garden teeming with lettuces and peppers was the maple tree. Their father stood underneath it. The ground was slushy and brown. It had rained for three days straight.

An empty nest was crumpled on the earth. Half of it was demolished, crushed into the ground. The other half was still holding on to form, the twigs and leaves sticking together. The maple tree had been cradling the nest, and the three baby robins. Rhiannon and her brother Tommy had watched them grow—first as eggs, then as little wet sack looking creatures. Rhiannon had sat out on the porch and sang little songs to the baby birds. They were loud and anxious, and sang back desperately.

Now, the nest was empty. And then Rhiannon spotted them. Two of the baby birds had broken legs. Her face contorted into the

awkward lines of their limbs.

"Dad!" She turned to him, but he had seen something else. One of the birds was intact. It chirped, and he leant down.

"Tommy, go and get a cardboard box."

When the boy came back, his chest heaving with morbid excitement, their father scooped the baby robin into the box and handed it to Rhiannon.

"Take this inside now, okay Rhee? Both of you, go."

Rhiannon soberly took the box and turned towards the house. The sun was setting against the maple tree, and the mountains were illuminated in the distance. Tommy walked by her side, peering at the treasure in her hands.

As they got to the door, Rhiannon turned back around to look at her father. He had not waited long enough. His back was to the kids.

The sun was behind their father, and threw a huge grotesque shadow of him over the lawn. He lifted his arms into the air, and up came a shovel, rising above his head. The shovel came down once, twice, three times on the crippled birds. The shadow repeated him. Rhiannon looked away, and faced the light, but the imprint of her father's shadow was scorched into her mind. His arms going up above his head. Methodically hitting over and over.

That night the last baby robin slept inside Rhiannon's house, shivering in a box by the window in the living room. Rhiannon slept, and dreamt of the dead birds spiraling around her, calling for their sister.

The next day Rhiannon watched the bird as it sat in the box. Their father hadn't put the lid on it; the bird seemed too young to fly. The bird's feathers were gray and white tufts. They were soft and precious and delicate. Rhiannon wanted to touch the bird. She looked into its eyes, and wondered if the baby bird was sad.

Rhiannon's mother talked on the phone in the kitchen, tidying cereal boxes and tired looking fruit, while grappling with the new baby around her waist. She craned her head to hold the cordless as she swept around the house.

"I know I said next Wednesday, but Tommy has to go to Worcester. What about Friday afternoon?" Her mother walked by Rhiannon, and tugged a piece of her long dark hair, trying to straighten her curls. She headed back into the kitchen, debating dinner choices to her confidante on the line.

The bird had big eyes, and constantly moved them around, taking in the surroundings. Rhiannon watched it craning its head side to side, and shifting weight.

Suddenly Rhiannon's hair took flight. The bird, gathering all its strength into a single burst of force, flew up – violently, and was now entrenched in the brown waterfall of hair. Rhiannon's eyes flew open in

shock. She froze.

"Tommy," she whispered. "Help me! Look!" She didn't run, didn't shake her head. She could feel the fluttering of the wings next to her right ear. Her mother was in the other end of the house, laughing. She couldn't help her now. Tommy looked up from the computer and watched Rhiannon in astonishment.

She reached her hands up, shaking, and gently cupped them around the rustling warm body in her hair. She felt the soft feathers, the quivering mechanisms of miniature bones under her fingertips. With careful movements, she freed the bird.

"Once a baby bird is touched by a human," her father told Rhiannon on the third day, "the mother will not take it back." He had come in from the garden, his hands covered in dirt. "So this means you and I need to be the mothers. And look what I got!" He grinned maniacally, and showed her a large worm proudly. The worm had dirt on it, and was very fat. It writhed back and forth in her father's wide palm.

"It looks too big." Rhiannon looked from the worm, to the bird's mouth. "I don't know if it can eat that much."

"It's fine Rhee. This is what it would be eating if its mom were around. Trust me." He demonstrated how to get the bird to eat the worm. First, Rhiannon had to wiggle her pinky finger next to the bird's mouth, to get it to open. And then, she had to put the end of the worm in its mouth.

The bird took it. Rhiannon sat down and wondered how her father knew so much about animals. She thought about birds and dogs and cats and how they were always beautiful and quite innocent. Her father left to feed her baby sister. She kept watch over her bird.

Then she noticed the bird was unnaturally still. She looked closer. The top of the worm's head was poking out of the bird's mouth. It was wiggling and shaking and pulling its body out. The bird's mouth was forced open, its head stretched back. Millimeter by millimeter, the worm crawled out of the birds mouth, until it was completely free. And the bird's eyes looked scared and numb.

Rhiannon looked at the little bird's body shaking and a cold chill came over her. She felt scared. She felt as though a worm had just crawled out of her belly, up her throat and out her mouth.

That night was a cold one. The family left the window open next to the bird's box. Through the screen was rolling hills, dark green trees, and more darkness. It was quiet. The baby bird looked out the window and waited.

The mother bird flew up to the window and sat on the ledge. She sang to her baby. She sang to her baby what it is to lose. She sang to her baby about life. About separation. She sang to her that her love

was not always enough, and that greater things in life could not always be controlled by those who were born into it. Most of all, she sang to her about acceptance.

The next morning Rhiannon woke up early. Her bed was warm and soft. She was reminded of the feathers of her bird. Instead of jumping up to check on it, she lay still. She felt sad. She wished she were still sleeping. Quietly, she got up and padded to the bathroom. The toilet seat was icy cold. She sat on it, and heard a knock.

"Rhee. The bird..." She could hear her brother pushed up against the other side of the door, his lips almost pressing into the room. She didn't want to see it, what she already knew.

She went into the living room. Light spilled across the dining table like splotches of paint. She tiptoed a soft path over to the box.

Inside, the bird was still. There was frost on its wings. The bird was frozen.

"Dad!" She hollered and her voice broke. She had known. Glassy eyes. Feathers stuck together. Tiny ribcage deflated.

Her father rubbed his eyes as he appeared from the master bedroom. His hair was sticking up in tufts. He stopped – saw Rhiannon holding the box out in front of her like a sacrifice. "Shit. Sorry. Baby, I'm sorry. It needed its mother. We couldn't do it for her."

He bent down in front of her. "Honey. Everything that is born will die. This is part of life..." Rhiannon looked up at him with feral eyes. She needed to hear that they had done all they could. She needed to be delivered. And then, her baby sister began to cry. A wail rose, deep from the stomach of the baby, and transgressed into a shrill piercing note.

"Sorry, Rhee." He grabbed her hand, fleetingly, then stumbled up and off to get the baby. Rhiannon stood with the bird in front of her. The bird's eyes were glassy. The body was still. Rhiannon threw on a little mermaid dressing gown and took the box and the shovel. The sky was misting, little raindrops matted her hair down to her face.

She dug into the earth, making little noises under her breath as the shovel bit into the ground. A few of her tears ran down her face and into the earth. Inside the house, lights had been turned on in most of the rooms. She saw through the window. Her father was holding the baby in the living room. She saw her mother join him, pulling out a breast to feed the hungry little mouth.

Carmella Roy Kearsley

Great Aunt Eva's Confession – July 18th, 1927

IS SHE OVERDRESSED? Perhaps she should dress like a peasant going to church in the old country in Abruzzi. That's where she's going – to church. Msgr.Vittorio, an immigrant from Abruzzi, hears confessions on Saturday; she will confess to no one else. Aunt Eva's petite image in the mirror does not comfort her; she sees her black, wild curly hair surrounding her cherubic face void of make-up, and her soft green-colored dress with its lace placket from thigh to knees. She is visibly agitated, her entire body, a barometer of feelings. Her heart under her substantial bosom is beating so hard, that her dress is dancing to the vibrations in her chest Behind her image, she sees the picture of her husband Lorenzo, meticulously groomed in a black, serge vested suit and broad brimmed felt hat, a carefully trimmed mustache over sensuous lips. She studies his picture with an anxious concentration.

Eva and her two children walk to church; they travel the solid rows of tenements lining street after street at Mulberry Bend. They feel at home here, walking by the tall tenements filled with fellow immigrants. The background is a calliope of sound, accompanied by an elaborate language of hands, arms and fingers, street cries of hurdy-gurdy players, and the thunder of the elevated. They pass picturesque little shops, with striped awnings, shops of expert artisans of foreign birth—masters of leather and jewelry. Mulberry Street market is colorful with white sheets of macaroni on racks in storefront windows. Chestnuts hanging on long strings and pushcarts filled with apples and olives line the curbs. Women sell oranges and onions and dark bread from baskets. At the end of the sidewalk, periwinkle snails, carrying their shells, peek over the edge of an oak barrel, stained dark with water, while clean laundry sways gently high on balconies, above the theatre of humanity. All around is heard the hearty laughter of a people who have grasped this kaleidoscopic city of New York for their own.

As Eva walks with her children, Loretta and Emilio, her mind is elsewhere; she does not see the man with a soft cotton magenta shirt and pink necktie and his woman with a waist of royal purple sash or an old woman selling red and yellow gladiolus. Eva reaches up to touch the curious shape of coral around her neck. A superstition brought from Italy, universal among the Italians, this tiny hand with the two middle fingertips touching the palm, leaving the other fingers like a projective prong, is capable of preventing *il malocchio*.

Arriving at the church on Parson's Blvd., Eva feels welcome at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in this Borough of Brooklyn; it is a humble church: a stone floor, stained glass windows, a fragrance of sanctified black and ancient-looking oak pews, and lights in tumblers of ruby colored glass. She is enveloped in a thick wonderful aroma of tallow from outed candles. Eva feels the humidity and oppressive air; she looks at St. Michael's statue with snakes under his feet, and then to the likeness of Our Lady of Perpetual Help; she looks into the Lady's compassionate eyes, and settles her children in a pew to wait.

The heat in the confession box is like the inside of a giant exhaust pipe; Eva is hot and sticky, her collar sticks to her neck and her stomach rumbles and growls. A swoosh of air as she kneels on the leather kneeler, and the click as the outside light goes on, signals everybody that the confessional is in use. Her anxiety bubbles to the surface again. The panel slides back:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," as the Msgr. makes the sign of the cross.

It takes Eva a few seconds to gather her courage and recall her thoughts. Msgr. is patient; he can smell her fear.

"Father?"

"Yes, when you're ready, begin."

"Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It is a long time since my last confession. Maybe fifteen years?"

With a sigh, Eva steps from the confessional and beckons to her children. One on either side of her, she takes their hands, genuflects and looks into the flat eyes of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The soles of their shoes sound softly on the stone aisle as they leave the church. The children's chatter on the way home is an ancient background song as Eva quietly unfolds her plan. She talks to the child she once was, in Abruzzi, trying to recall how it was to taste a happy life: to suck and savor the last sweet drop of juice out of an orange, and be joyful – an empty illusion!

Back in the second floor apartment, Eva turns on the Victrola to play Pagliaccio. The children sit listening on the sofa, their feet restless, their hands resting on their laps, in the room where most of the wall space is hung with their childhood artwork.

Eva has changed into her melon-colored dress, a perky hat with a feather over her wild black curls, a red leather pocketbook brought from the old country and her best, low-heeled black shoes with the sling straps, that slide sensuously up and down as she walks. Her eyes are moist as she instructs the children:

"Now you must sit and wait for Papa. He will be closing the barber shop in a half hour. Tell him Mama has left a note for him on his pillow."

She kisses both children but does not hug them.

The headline in the paper on the morning of July 19, 1927:

"A young immigrant mother of two was seen jumping from The Brooklyn Bridge yesterday afternoon at 5:30 P.M., leaving her pocketbook behind. Her body has not yet been recovered."

"My Beloved Lorenzo,

How can I deny my love for you and our children? How can I live without the sound of your laughter that polishes my heart? Msgr. Vittorio said because we are first cousins, our love is a mortal sin, and our children are bastards, and we will all go to Hell. Tell our children to remember me as loving them. Since I first held you in my arms, I have never regretted loving you. If I have not worshiped at an empty shrine, Almighty God will grant us absolution. Goodbye, Lorenzo!

Your Eva"

Keriann McLaughlin

Slipping

WHEN MY SISTER Jessie comes home from school she smells sharp and sweet, like a mixture of maple syrup and something else I can't figure out. Her eyes look glassy and tired and she usually lies down on her bed for a few hours and tells me not to bother her. My mom is usually sitting at the kitchen table when she comes home, her hands wrapped around a cup of coffee like she's trying to keep warm, staring at the table. Sometimes Mom looks like she might cry.

My sister wakes up after a few hours and stays up late doing her homework. "Get A's in everything," Jessie tells me, "then you can do whatever you want and Mom and Dad will leave you alone." Once she checks to make sure that Mom and Dad are asleep she sneaks out her window, usually not coming back for hours.

"You can sleep in my bed while I'm gone," she tells me, leaving the window open just a bit so she can get back in. The breeze from the open window rustles the papers on Jessie's desk, and a mobile I made for her last year dangles from the ceiling, fluttering quietly. I curl up in the spot that smells like her and fall asleep. When Jessie comes home her footsteps are quiet on the thick carpet and she crawls into bed, sleeping beside me for what seems like minutes before it is time to get up for school.

Two nights ago, on Saturday, Jessie came back very late and threw up in the bathroom for a long time. Dad yelled at her from the hallway and Mom cried in their bedroom. The next morning Dad and Jessie were in the study forever. When she came out I overheard Dad tell Mom that Jessie was a good kid and they needed to cut her a break.

"She's just being a normal kid," Dad tells Mom, "Don't worry so much. It's nothing we never did."

When Dad was done talking I went upstairs and asked Jessie what it was she was doing.

"Nothing," she said.

The best time for me is when Jessie comes back late from doing nothing and curls up beside me in bed. She wraps her arms around me and pulls me close, tucking my head under her chin. She smells sweet and clean, a mixture of the maple syrup smell and cold, clean soil from outside. I listen as her breathing slows and for a short time we lie there, suspended–just the two of us. Jessie holds me tight, and I'm glad because I know something is slipping away from us but I don't know how to stop it. Sometimes I cry quietly while we lie there. One night I heard Jessie sniffling as she held me.

"What are you crying about?" I whispered.

"Nothing," she whispered back, tightening her arms around me.

Justin Pilotte

Saved

KRIS, JON, AND MARIA are in the middle of the desert. A cactus stands off to one side, looking eerily like a cross. A vulture waits patiently on one of its branches. Kris is on his hands and knees digging a hole. Jon is lying to the right of Kris, passed out. Maria lies off to the left, dead. Behind the hole, which is center upstage, sit two chairs, side by side.

JON: (*Shakes his head because he is just waking up*) Kris? Where are we?
KRIS: (*Barely acknowledging Jon*) In the desert. Keep digging, Jon.
JON: (*Stands up*) What are we doing out here?
KRIS: Completing our good deed. Keep digging.
JON: What good deed? (*Looks around*)
KRIS: (*pointing to Maria*) That one.
JON: I see. (*Starts to dig swiftly*) Why is there a dead girl on the ground?
KRIS: You killed her. Remember?
JON: (*Stops digging, looks puzzled*) No.
KRIS: Well, that's what Tijuana does to you. Keep digging.
JON: Tijuana?
KRIS: Yah.
JON: We were there?
KRIS: Yep.
JON: (*Lost*) I don't remember…
KRIS: That's what Tijuana does to you.
JON: And the dead girl? (*Indicates Maria*)
KRIS: Not a girl, a hooker. You killed her. Remember?
JON: A girl and a hooker are the same damn thing, and no, I don't remember.
KRIS: (*Stops digging, says entire line looking into the hole*) They're not the same. With a girl there is presumed innocence. With a hooker it is known that there is no such thing as innocence, and she is seen as a walking, talking, fucking sin. (*Resumes digging*)
JON: To each their own, that is what I say.
KRIS: That's why you're going to hell.
JON: What? (*Shakes his head and shrugs it off*)
They both resume digging
JON: (*Stops digging*) Why did we go to Tijuana?
KRIS: To find Jesus, keep digging.
JON: (*Resumes digging*) Did we find him?
KRIS: Yes.

JON: Was he what we expected?
KRIS: Yes.
JON: Will he save me?
KRIS: From what?
JON: This trouble.
KRIS: What trouble?
JON: This trouble. (*Indicates dead hooker*)
KRIS: I doubt it.
JON: Why? Isn't he what we expected?
KRIS: Yes.
JON: (*Stops digging*) Then why won't he save me?
KRIS: (*Stops digging*) Because you sinned. He'll most likely kill you.
JON: That's not what I expected.
KRIS: He's exactly what we expected.

Sounds of sex. Moaning, groaning, and bedsprings add to the chorus. It gets loud and passionate as the climax comes and goes. The woman screams words in Spanish.

Lights up on a hotel room. There is a bed with two end tables; a coat rack with Kris' leather jacket hanging on it and a table is next to it with a woman's purse on it. Kris and Maria are in bed, lying next to each other but not cuddling.

MARIA: (*Turns to Kris*) Your friend OK out there?
KRIS: Yeah, he's fine.
MARIA: Oh. (*Pause*) You don't talk much, are you OK?
KRIS: Yeah, I feel great.
MARIA: Good. (*Settles into the bed and stares at ceiling*)
KRIS: (*Pulling the sheets back*) I suppose you want to get paid.

Kris gets out of bed, stark naked. He puts on a pair of boxers and walks over to his coat. He pulls the wallet out and starts rummaging through money.

KRIS: (*Not looking up*) You believe in Jesus?
MARIA: What?
KRIS: (*Looking up for a moment*) Do you believe in Jesus?
MARIA: (*Taken aback*) Of course I do.
KRIS: (*Takes some money out of his wallet*) They say he's our Lord and Savior, do you believe that?
MARIA: Yes.
KRIS: What has he saved us from? Eternal damnation? Saved us from our sins? It doesn't look like his efforts took us very far. In my opinion, he hasn't saved anyone.

Kris puts his wallet back into the coat and places the money on the table next to the purse, making sure Maria sees what he is doing.

KRIS: (*Standing by the table*) They say he died for our sins. I say he died because of our sins, but that's neither here nor there.
MARIA: (*Shocked*) Blasphemy!
KRIS: (*Getting excited*) YES! BLASPHEMY! And isn't it blasphemous to commit mass genocide in the name of the Lord? Isn't it blasphemy to terrorize in the name of Allah?
MARIA: (*Uncomfortable*) Uh…. (*Squirming*)
KRIS: I suppose not. So much blood has been shed to support the belief of God that I've come to this conclusion: Jesus is a killer.

Kris takes the six-shooter out of the inside jacket pocket, using a handkerchief to hold it, so no fingerprints are left. The hooker's eyes grow wide with horror.

David St. Clair

Grill Cheezin'

A FOUR-STAR hotel room. GEORGE W. BUSH lies in a queen-sized bed wearing childlike pajamas. Sitting at a table set opposite the bed are DONALD RUMSFELD and DICK CHENEY who are both wearing suits. Standing in the background is CONDOLEEZZA RICE who is likewise dressed in business attire and holding a cell phone.

GEORGE: At least now we don't have to come up with rent.
DICK: Shut up, George! (to DONALD) How the hell are we going to spin the president burning down the White House?
DONALD: Maybe we could work terrorism into it somehow.
GEORGE: Yeah, let's raise the terror alert! We'll say that Osama bin Laden broke in –
DICK: Shut up, George! How many times have I told you not to use the oven unsupervised?
GEORGE: But, Dick, I had the munchies.
DICK: Then you should have had a Twinkie!
GEORGE: But my stomach was asking for a grilled cheese.
DICK: George, shut up! I'm serious! I don't want to hear another peep out of you!

The cell phone rings. CONDOLEEZZA answers it.

CONDOLEEZZA: Yes? Uh huh…OK.

She ends the phone call.

CONDOLEEZZA: John Kerry held a press conference.
DONALD: And?
CONDOLEEZA: He said the White House never would have burned down if he were in office. Apparently, when he was in college, he put out a grease fire on the stove in his apartment. Single-handedly saved all three of his roommates.
DICK: What an asshole! This could cost us the election!
DONALD: Relax, Dick. You're going to give yourself another heart attack. That's just Kerry's version of the story. We'll find out what the other people in the apartment building remember happening.
GEORGE: Yeah, anyway, have you seen the size of that guy's noggin? It's huge! His brain's got to be three or four times bigger than mine. I

can't compete with that.
DICK: George, I swear to Christ, if you don't shut your face –
GEORGE: I'm sorry, Dick, but I'm just so hungry! I think there's a Wendy's around here. Can we go? Can we? Please!
DICK: Another word and you'll be eating through a tube, you goddamn redneck!

The cell phone rings again. CONDOLEEZZA answers it.

CONDOLEEZZA: Yes? Uh huh…OK. (She covers the receiver of the phone) Ralph Nader held a press conference.
DONALD: What did he have to say?
CONDOLEEZZA: We're not sure yet. Apparently, none of the press actually showed up cause no one gives a shit what he has to say anyway.

She continues the phone call in hushed tones.

GEORGE: That lazy-eyed old coot cracks me up.
DONALD: (to DICK) Let's put our heads together. We need to figure out our next step.
GEORGE: Can we rebuild the White House in Texas? And let's paint it red!

CONDOLEEZZA ends the phone call.

CONDOLEEZZA: John Kerry held another press conference.
DONALD: What for?
CONDOLEEZZA: To say that, although he supports grilled cheese sandwiches cooked on the stovetop, he feels that it's better to make them in a microwave.
GEORGE: In Texas, we call that white trash.
DICK: He's kissing ass with the dairy voters.
DONALD: But he's alienating the natural gas voters.
DICK: Ketchup boy just doesn't know when to quit. (Pulls a silver flask out of his pocket and guzzles from it)
GEORGE: Can we call the new White House the W. House? Cause I'm George W. Bush, get it?
DONALD: We get it, George. Why don't you take a nap, big guy? It's been a long day.
GEORGE: I'm really not that tired, Rummy.
DONALD: Well, why don't you try holding your breath until you pass out? Remember when I showed you how to do that?
GEORGE: I'll give it a shot.
DICK: If you need some help, George, just ask. 'Cause I'd love to help

you.
GEORGE: Will do, Dick.

GEORGE holds his breath.
The cell phone rings again. CONDOLEEZZA answers it.

CONDOLEEZZA: Yes? Sure, hold on one second. (She extends the phone to GEORGE) George, it's your father.
GEORGE charges out of bed to take the call.
GEORGE: Hey, daddy! How's it hanging…well, I was cooking a grilled cheese, and I had to tinkle. When I got back, the whole place was up in flames. I tried asking myself what Jesus would do, but all the smoke made it tough to think straight…oh, yeah, I'm fine…love you too, daddy. Bye. (Hands the phone back to CONDOLEEZZA) That was my dad. Just making sure I was OK.
DONALD: We know, George. Now get back to holding your breath.

non-fiction

Joe Bonni

Sympathy For The Devil

IF YOU WERE GOING to defy a God, how much convincing would it take? According to the Old Testament, it takes only five lines of conversation. In Genesis 3:1-5, Eve has a brief conversation with a serpent and is convinced to risk death and the wrath of God for a bite of forbidden fruit. In return for her decision, all of humanity is cursed and forced to toil. It seems unlikely that such an important choice could be made so quickly and with such little prodding. I think that perhaps we have been shortchanged in regards to this most important of dialogues, a dialogue which has essentially set the standards, right or wrong, for how many Westerners view themselves in the grand order of things as well as how members of each gender view each other historically, spiritually, and hierarchically. I have suspected all along that Eve and the serpent were neither evil nor sinners and that their conversation that day, like so many histories, has been rewritten by the victors, that is, by men deeply entrenched in self-serving patriarchies. It's time to set the record straight, and tell the rest of the story…

EVE SAT AND STARED at the tree. Every day she had walked by it and thought about the warning Adam had given her: the fruit of The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil shall not be eaten, lest we die. God said so. Or at least Adam said so. But it seemed odd for a God to surround Adam and her with so much plenty, and then, in the center of it all, plant one tree and forbid its fruit. God works in mysterious ways, she supposed, but still, it was strange behavior even for HIM. She lay in the grass naked, staring up at the tree, warmed by the sun, held by the soft grass, and lulled into a nap by soothing winds.

"Hello, beautiful." Eve woke and as she slowly opened her eyes she saw a serpent wrapped around the tree, leisurely gliding its way up the trunk and gazing upon her. He was smiling and she smiled back. "It's no wonder God rested after HE made you – there was no need to create anything else – in you, HE knew HE was done, HIS creation perfect."

"Why thank you." She sat up, tossed her hair and then asked of him, "You don't plan on climbing the tree and eating of its fruit do you? Surely Adam has told you that to do so means death."

"Is that what he told you?" The serpent asked back.

"Yes, in fact, as far as I know, it is the only rule we have. Curious, isn't it?"

"Very," the serpent replied, closing his eyes and gently bobbing his head in the wind. "But you ought to be careful about what Adam and HE tell you."

"Oh? Have they not told me the truth?"

"Well, no, it would be unfair to call either of them a liar. But you have to be careful. Gods and their followers tend to be simultaneously literal and symbolic when they speak, and sorting out the two can take some work. For instance, it is true that if you eat of this tree you will die. But not right away, and, in fact, not for a very long time from now. It might be fair to say that if you eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil you will die…eventually." The serpent paused while she pondered what he said. He sniffed at the air with his tongue and then continued, "But of course, when I put it that way, it doesn't quite have the same impact, the same motivating force as leaving off that last word now does it? Take you for instance – earlier I said that you were the last of all HIS creations – but are you certain?"

"Well, I don't ever remember being here before anything else. As far back as I can recall, everything has been here and there has been nothing new created since I've been here. And Adam said…"

"Ah, yes, Adam said…" the serpent interrupted her. "…that you were made from his rib. 'Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, yadda yadda yadda…' That's his story, but I was there. It's not accurate. It's what HE told Adam, and again, in a metaphoric sense it's true, for each of you might be considered made of the same stuff, but I was there[1] and you were not made last; you were both made at the same time."[2]

"But why tell me otherwise?"

"Has HE told you otherwise? Or have you only heard Adam's version of the events? How many times has Adam recited his 'flesh of my flesh' poetry? And conversely, has God ever spoken to you directly to tell you that you were an afterthought?"

"No," she whispered; and then fell quiet. She let his words sink in for quite some time. "How do you know all this? Who are you?" she asked finally. She was distressed, confused, maybe even angry.

"Please allow me to introduce myself, or perhaps you'd like to guess my name? I've been around a long, long time, and I think it's the nature of my game that might be upsetting you more than my name. But why play games at all, that's what Adam and HE have been doing with you. Just call me Lucifer."

"The bringer of light?"[3]

"The illuminator – sure – why not. I am cursed you see. Unlike your friend Adam and his God, I cannot mince words, obfuscate or deceive, only reveal things, show things to you – I can only tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me…well, never mind. As my name implies, I can be your light in the darkness."[4]

She stood up and their eyes were even now. Years later holy men

would learn to hypnotize, charm if you will, serpents like Lucifer, but here, it was hard to tell who was more in awe of the other. Though the serpent had raised her ire, she did not perceive within him deception. But still, she was not yet entirely convinced that he was as wise as he claimed to be. "If you are such a revealer of the truth, shine your light on the answer to a question that has been plaguing me. Why doesn't HE want us to eat from the tree?"

"Has HE ever told you not to eat from the tree?"

"HE told Adam, and Adam told me."

"Are we beginning to see a pattern here? Don't get me wrong; HE loves you and so does Adam. HE knows that to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is to become illuminated, to become like the Gods – you will gain the knowledge to create life yourself; like you are HIS children, so will you know how to make and love your own children. But, HE also knows the price you will have to pay to become such a Goddess. HE knows first-hand it is hard and sometimes thankless work, infinitely hard work, and unlike HIM, unfortunately, as beautiful as your body is, it was not made to last for infinity. Godhood will kill this body of yours in the end. Have you watched the bull mount the cow? Have you seen her distress and pain when she delivers her calf? Have you watched their last gasps before their bodies ultimately die after spending years protecting and rearing their young?"

"I have witnessed all of that suffering." She held his gaze in a brief moment of silence and then added, "And yearned for it."

"HE knows. HE also knows that you cannot enjoy that suffering without Adam's complicity. Here's the deal Goddess Most Beautiful, eat the fruit and convince Adam to as well and eventually you will both die. HE will be pissed at you for imploring Adam to disobey his word. HE will kick both of you out of this paradise. You will suffer, and toil, and hurt, and become old and frail and sickly some day. All of this will happen for certain. But just as certainly, you will create life. You will create flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone, out of woman will so many be taken. You will work hard to feed them, defend them, educate them. You will love; not just one man and one god, but you will love those of your own making. Your heart will open to an infinite number of souls and you will be like God. You will be a Goddess.

"Take a look at Adam – do you want to spend forever with just him? The knowledge of good and evil is truly the knowledge of what is good for you and what is not. Is 'good' a life forever as the play thing of a God, or a life of love – of love of your man, your children, your clan…a life of heartbreak and joy incomparable to the banal repetition of naming animals and walking in this cloistered garden. If you eat, your life may fade from this world someday, but you, and here's the kicker, YOU, not Adam or HIM, will also bring life into this world. You are a Goddess in waiting and both of them know it. Do you want to be a creator of life,

a Goddess, to love infinitely, or do you want to be ruled and love only what you have now – what you see before you? Is it good or evil to be offered eternal life but only if you trade away your own divinity? These are HIS rules. But you are not bound. The tree is here in front of you; HE wouldn't have made it unintentionally. The choice is yours."

By the time Lucifer had finished speaking, she was smiling. Glowing even. She leaned forward and kissed the serpent gently on the nose. "Thank you," she whispered. And then reached up and picked two pieces from the tree. "Adam!" she called as she walked away from the tree, "Let's eat!"

Notes

[1] The serpent was there. The animals (And one should assume, the serpent was an animal) were made before man and woman according to Genesis Chapter 1.

[2] In 1:26 God says, "Let us make humankind." (By 'us' we might assume that he is either referring to all the animals on the earth, or all the other spiritual beings - Gods, angels, what have you). Furthermore, HE states clearly in 1:26 – 28 that HE makes humankind, both male and female in his own image, and in 1:27 in particular the Old Testament states (the importance of this verse can be evidenced by it being separated out into rhythmic verse form the rest of the chapter): "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them male and female he created them." That one or the other came first is not even suggested. It is only in the second version of the creation of man in Chapter 2, that there is a contrasting version placing Adam first.

[3] Lucifer is loosely translated into: the bearer or bringer of light

[4] "Gnosticism" Rev 11/15/2004 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosticism (11/20/2004). In various Gnostic traditions, many which predate Christianity, "Lucifer" is looked upon as the light-bringer, the bringer of Wisdom, and in those Gnostic Traditions that grew alongside (and perhaps with) early Christianity, the character of the Serpent was not looked at as evil, but as salvation, allowing mankind the wisdom to escape from authoritarian rule. I realize this summary barely begins to describe Gnostic tradition but very intriguing for it's alternative history of the Catholic Church, which also deals with Luciferianism and Gnosticism is: Timothy Freke & Peter Grandy, The Jesus Mysteries (New York: Harmony Books, 2000)

Matthew Holland

Indian Point

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL place in the world is Sea Beach, (out on Indian Point, in Georgetown, Maine). Sea Beach is the inner lining of a cove; it follows a gentle, concave curve between the rocky coast at its northeastern end and the Promontory to the southwest. We drive up after midnight and I walk barefoot through the yard around my grandmother's cottage; the grass is wet with dew. I follow a path towards the beach, soon treading not on grass but on black, sedimentary bedrock. It is the kind of rock that flakes off into book-flat pebbles perfect for skimming across the cove and it feels like sandpaper. I reach the last slope before the beach: the rock is slightly indented in the middle, and gently lowers the walker at an angle about fifteen degrees below horizontal. Could such a perfect ramp be formed and positioned by blind geologic forces?

As I step onto the beach, the cool night sand embraces my feet. I let my eyes adjust to the light coming from the moon and reflected from the water in the cove. I proceed stepping over sun-hardened patches of prickly seaweed, meandering towards the other end of the beach. The high tide leaves about forty feet of dry sand between the waves and the grass-covered dunes. I move along the curve of the cove towards a great prow of black rock jutting into the water. It is the same type of rock I crossed to reach the beach, and it cuts off the last fifth of the sandy strip. At low tide, there is a vast expanse of wave-packed sand on which I can walk around these rocks. Tonight the ocean leaves only the path over the top.

I am almost at this rocky prow when I see that someone has recently erected a small fortress of drifted logs. A narrow tree-trunk impales a green-and-yellow fragment of foam, a lost lobster buoy now looking down on the ocean where it was designed to float; it is still a flag. I wonder who builds these fortresses. She might wonder who I am too, as I always leave structures on the beach. My father used to build driftwood structures here with a hammer and nails; I sometimes use a spade for excavating in the sand. I don't think this mysterious builder uses tools: his work looks more spontaneous than premeditated.

Now I tap the black rock of the great prow, not physically, but with my mind; I suppose I am already there. Maybe I have subconsciously realized that the same rock formation is directly underfoot, separated from me by a few inches of insignificant sand. Maybe my aura of direct awareness extends that few feet out in front of my body. Regardless, I am

there; I have completed my necessary communion with the beach.

Why is it here, on Indian Point, in Georgetown, Maine, that I feel safe? I feel safe enough to walk around barefoot at night; what is safe about it? Is it the changeless environment, human and physical? The sands of Sea Beach fall in a little differently each year, but never where they have not fallen before. The changes in the people are barely perceptible. Every year when I see my father's mother, Grammy, she looks the same as she did the last year; only when I compare her with a picture from ten years before do I see that her appearance is not static.

There is something very disarming about stasis. If I know exactly what to expect each time I arrive at Indian Point, I can let my guard down, I do not need to be prepared to respond to unique and challenging situations. What if there is some dramatic change? Will I no longer feel safe here? It's hard for me to imagine the circumstances. The rocks aren't going anywhere in a hurry; neither are my paternal relatives, some ten or more nuclear families of them. What if one year Sea Beach is flooded with tourists, the woods are teeming with new construction, noisy four-wheelers rule the road, and hunters' gunshots resound across the point? Will I loose my love for this place in these extreme circumstances? Will I no longer feel safe? Or is there something beyond relative stasis that I connect with in this corner of Maine?

Maybe it is the ocean. On Indian Point, the ocean has designed so many different ways to connect to the land. Of course there is Sea Beach—dulling the waves and welcoming shore-dwellers into its embrace. My cousin, Christian Holland, had never seen the ocean before he visited us from Wyoming. Wearing blue-jeans, he stood for hours in the surf on Sea Beach to meet the ocean for the first time. If Christian had walked southwest to the edge of Sea Beach he would have reached the Promontory, extending out into the waves and completing the arc of the cove. This white (and in places, pink) finger of granite is a grandstand from which hundreds could watch the ocean, but I usually have it to myself. Swells come splashing into the various crevices of the Promontory and shoot white spray skyward. Past the Promontory and out around the other side of the point is Sagadahoc Bay, formed entirely of fine, silver-gray sand that can hold my footprints intact for hours. The waves barely penetrate the bay at all, generating nothing more than a soft lapping. It is reminiscent of a large lake except that it is emptied twice daily at low tide. Up the coast about half a mile from Sea Beach, in the opposite direction from the Promontory, is Little River, a tidal inlet that drains the salt marsh beside Reid State Park. As the tide pulls out, water from the marsh spirals through the sand flats of Little River, carving a channel and building a strong current. One time my great-grandmother—or another female relative I never met—was sitting in the middle of the sand reading the Sunday paper. When the tide turned around, water began to back up the channel but she didn't notice. Then

the water filled in around the edges of the sand flats and she was on a shrinking island. In what I'm told was a characteristic display, she refused the help of other family members and gamely waded to the shore, holding her beach chair aloft. At Little River, the ocean will literally wrap its arms around you.

How might it be that the ocean provides the safety I feel here? It is not in a physical sense; being near the ocean I am more likely to be in a hurricane; playing in the ocean I am more likely to drown. But every night I sleep in our cottage, the last thing I hear is the regular, white noise of the ocean waves. And every morning when I descend the stairs, the ocean is spread before me through the four-pane, panoramic picture window at the corner of the living room. Some mornings a dazzling trail of light reaches across the cove and out towards an energetic sun. Other mornings, the ocean reflects the solid gray sky and together they form an expansive, soft-as-down envelope for my day. But no matter what the mood of the sky, the ocean reflects it without altering its rhythm. Small waves or large swells hit the rocks in the same time signature; the ocean proceeds without regard for human-time, so we must specify the tides each day in calendars and charts that translate from ocean-time. From my shore-bound perspective, the ocean itself provides the safety of dynamic regularity.

Even if Indian Point is under siege by tourists in four-wheelers, the ocean will remain undaunted and unchanged. Even if our government implodes and all our cities explode, the ocean will be the same. And if I visit the ocean after my parents and grandparents die, it will not have changed since the days I spent here with them. It is from the changelessness that I derive the safety of Indian Point; not the stasis of the point but the changelessness of the ocean.

Jessica Lee

Do Natural Rights Exist?

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the governed…

These opening phrases of the Declaration of Independence are perhaps some of the most familiar words on the American political landscape. Since Thomas Jefferson first laid pen to paper in his drafting of a treasonous letter to King George III, that passage has been quoted and re-quoted so many times that most Americans would hardly be able to tell you who said it originally. Everyone from Abraham Lincoln, to Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., to Susan B. Anthony have used these words at least in part to pursue their own political or social agenda. In short, these words embody an American truism that most of us take for granted more often than not. We have grown up with the clear understanding that we have rights under our system of government that cannot be violated without a very compelling reason, because they are considered non-negotiable. However, does this mean that our Creator actually did grant these Rights to us?

To answer this question, I resort to Thomas Hobbes' theory of social contract. Specifically, Hobbes believed that prior to the existence of government, or even society in any meaningful sense of the term, men lived a warlike existence that was ruled by the law of the jungle. In that situation, men did what they could get away with doing to better their own lives. If a man was hungry, who was to stop him from taking someone else's food? Only the guy whose food it was initially, and if he was weaker than his attacker, what then? The second man goes hungry while the first eats.

Today, of course, we have rules governing behavior like this. Not only does the second man have a legal claim to the product of his labor (one assumes he either killed or grew whatever it was he was about to eat), but we also believe he has a moral right not to be robbed. Society today has no sympathy for the stronger man who stole from the weak in order that he should be more comfortable himself. We want to say that he should have left the second man alone and found some other means of eating. But does this reverse Robin Hood complex of ours really a natural right make?

The litmus test, I believe, is that a natural right should be

something that every human being would be able to arrive at independent of outside influence. Realistically, the only things that qualify in that case are rights grounded in instinct. Everyone is hardwired from the day we are born with an instinct for self-preservation and survival. That urge to survive is basic and common to everyone, regardless of where or when they live. I suggest that there is exactly one natural right, which we all possess by virtue of being human, because it is the one thing we have been unquestionably able to do since Hobbes' state of nature.

We have an absolutely natural right to do whatever we can to better our own lot in life. The Pursuit of Happiness, to use Jefferson's phrase, is the *only* right we are born with, because it is the only truly universally recognized one. Even in the most oppressive conditions, where life is regulated down to the second, there are always minute measures human beings are capable of taking to slightly improve their world. This might be as simple as an abused or neglected child collecting pretty stones and glass as a way of proving to themselves they have their own stuff (a reasonably common practice among children growing up in the foster care system), or as complex as a slave who becomes the overseer for a plantation and is therefore responsible for aiding the system he himself is trying to escape. The one common denominator is that in all cases, a person is going to do whatever they reasonably believe they are able to do for themselves.

All other rights you can name, including those to Life, Liberty, and any other that might be called natural by some, are fundamentally social constructions. They exist only inasmuch as some society says they do. There has never been a time when anyone with the authority came along and said, "Humanity, here are the ground rules. You have these rights, and you aren't allowed to break them because they are natural." Individual societies see this kind of thing happen all the time, when various kings or religious leaders will lay down the laws of the land concerning the rights of the citizens. But never has some independent and powerful third party delivered a list of natural rights to us.

For something to be natural, it has to be as obvious as "Feet are for walking and we have two of them." Rights are tricky, because some that are obvious to us are totally unheard of by others, and vice versa. Not everyone on Earth has always been aware that these rights *should* even exist, never mind that they are *natural* ones. If it is possible to be unaware of a natural right, where did it come from to begin with? The answer is that we have realized over time that we were wrong, and have modified our behavior accordingly. Which is great and admirable, of course, but it is also a *social* phenomenon- not a natural one!

Even the single natural right will sometimes come into conflict with the rights of others. In that case, one must first ask whether the natural right trumps the other. In some situations, the right to better your situation will trump the other right, although not in all of them.

However, in no situation can you really find fault with the motivation. This is really how you can tell it is a universal right. Only if a right is truly universal will the motivation for action be universally understood. In order to clarify what I mean, consider this example:

In *The Dead Zone* Primo Levi describes a situation that occurred in the Auschwitz Death Camp during the Second World War. The SS had instituted a policy in the camp to the effect that they would provide an extra ration of food to any Jew who would agree to help unload the trains entering the camp. It was a well-known fact that these trains carried human beings who were destined for the gas chamber. The job of the Jews who cooperated would be to rush to the door of the car, pull it open, and yell for the passengers to quickly run inside. Once they had done that, the new arrivals would be in the hands of the SS again. The other responsibility of these cooperating Jews would be to move the bodies from the gas chambers to the incinerators.

Ever since the war ended, it has been a difficult thing for historians and philosophers alike to assign a degree of responsibility to the people who participated in this. On the one hand, they knowingly assisted in the mass murder of millions of innocent people. Although there were attempts at resistance by a few (occasionally a chamber or an incinerator would be disabled somehow), by and large they went along with the process quietly. They took advantage of the trust these victims had in people they knew were "on their side," and literally led them to their deaths- all for a few extra bites of bread and maybe a potato.

On the other hand, not even the rest of the living population of Auschwitz was really able to fault them for doing what they did. Levi certainly speaks of them with no real ill will, just a sense of puzzlement as to how they brought themselves to be able to act convincingly every day for months. It is very difficult to imagine a situation so horrible, but when it came, it was largely a matter of "someone is going to die today: me or him."

In a case of life or death, although the choices people make might be different, the instinct for self-preservation and survival is always and undeniably there. That instinct lays the groundwork for and is part and parcel of the only truly natural right; the right to do what you can to improve your lot in life. If a person is physically, mentally, and psychologically able to do something which will improve their situation, it is difficult to fault them for going for it. Sometimes, of course, this instinct will have you running afoul of another individual's rights as society defines them, but even in the very worst scenarios the natural right will remain a constant.

JohnPaul Magenis

Naked Watermelon

IT IS 10:16 A.M. ON WEDNESDAY morning and I am eating watermelon naked in the back yard, blasting Concrete Blonde, unemployed. While I crunch the seeds and grind the pulp, a velvet woman's voice drones on about vampires. The scene is punctuated by the occasional sound of a hammer stroke.

If I had a place out in the country, I could be naked most of the time. Instead, I only take this liberty while the other people in the neighborhood are at work, or I guess, the men in this neighborhood are. I see the women walk with their yoga mats past the acequia and down the street each day a little before noon.

The street is lined with walls, which enclose the courtyards that are common with larger adobe houses. The cluster of cottages that I am staying in is owned by a single woman, each of them heroically cheap considering the going rate of rent in Santa Fe at the turn of the century. As if to legitimize the lack of wealth on this side of the street, one of the neighbors has several large, quickly rusting appliances out in his yard. They have been here as long as I have, and that is the better part of two weeks. My friends have since gone, leaving the place to me. How they found the cheapest rent in a city which has become a tourist warren out in a neighborhood on the east side with its art galleries and yoga wives is beyond me, but I am thankful for it.

This has long been a dream of mine, a small place out in a dry climate with a claw-foot tub. I have taken a number of baths, though I feel rather guilty about the drought and leave my left over bath water for doing dishes and the like. This may seem repulsive, but as I am the only person in the house and one who is given to simple cuisine that requires little after-work, I assure you it is not.

I am no stranger to complicated cuisine. I spent the last two years working in the cavernous kitchens that serve the buffets and restaurants at the Bellagio, or New York, New York, or the Luxor. I worked at all of them, and a few of the less known casinos. They have a lot in common: first and foremost they all require enormous amounts of food to be prepared. It is an almost grotesque and constant stream. I once got lost for twenty minutes in one of the walk-ins beneath the Luxor. I wouldn't have been surprised to stumble across some blue-lipped explorer complete with bottled oxygen on my way out the door. The other thing they have in common is bad management and a willingness to break their employees before paying them to work harder. I walked out

of my last job there a few days ago.

It was a typical night. I was to be tying, herbing, then braising the fillet mignons so we could set them aside and give them a quick fire in the convection ovens before tossing them at the fleet footed lads who would run them through miles of service tunnels before they reached whatever dining room, buffet line, or hotel room had demanded them.

I was standing about cutting small slashes in the fillets with the Wusthof knife that my mother had purchased me for Christmas and trading witty repartee with my partner in line, Raoul, about whether one of the new food runners was simply gay or really a transvestite as his cousin over in prep asserted during last evening's rush.

This is when I realized that the three aspirins I had just chewed up and thrown down with the flat ginger ale I had left at my station from yesterday were not going to cut it. Not tonight. As a matter of fact, I realized that it was not the headache that was getting to me. It was something else.

It felt like I had a very large leech or something inside my body cavity. It was a strange feeling in my stomach, no, right in my chest. Well, it was a feeling that originated in my stomach and seemed to be primarily contained in the hollow right beneath my sternum. You know, the one right beneath the xiphoid process. It was growing, and as I reach my hand underneath the stainless steel table opposite the grill, Raoul looks at me and asks if I am alright. I smile and grasp the leg of the table with one hand and place the flat of the Wusthof against the back of the arm. The feeling in my abdomen seems to pulse as it recognizes the threat. Then it continues to swell. I start to sweat, and continue to smile in a pained way at Raoul. It called my bluff.

The blade feels thin and cool when I turn it so the business end is touching my skin. I wonder if it is going to hurt; I'll cut through the muscle on the top of the arm and the muscles on the pale belly of my arm will yank my hand flat away from the cut. I imagine that that will cause the cut to spray blood, possibly across the table at Raoul. That might be good for a laugh later. Like, four weeks from now.

For certain the cut will take my mind off whatever flora or fauna is growing inside my solar plexus and will also render my arm useless for weeks. I think for a sec if I could get workman's comp for this. It seems possible.

Raoul asks again, this time his voice is louder and more insistant. He is supposed to be dicing parsley but he is just hacking the shit out of it right now. His body is on autopilot and he says he thinks that I am looking not well. Several of the other line cooks hear the hint of something afoot in his voice and look. I look at him, certain that my eyes are pinched and red and I realize that I am not alright. My hand unclenches. The rigor of my smile relaxes. My headache is gone. I clean my knife with a flourish and walk out. I still have not been back to my

apartment. I called the kids down here on my cell right before I started my car. It was a long drive.

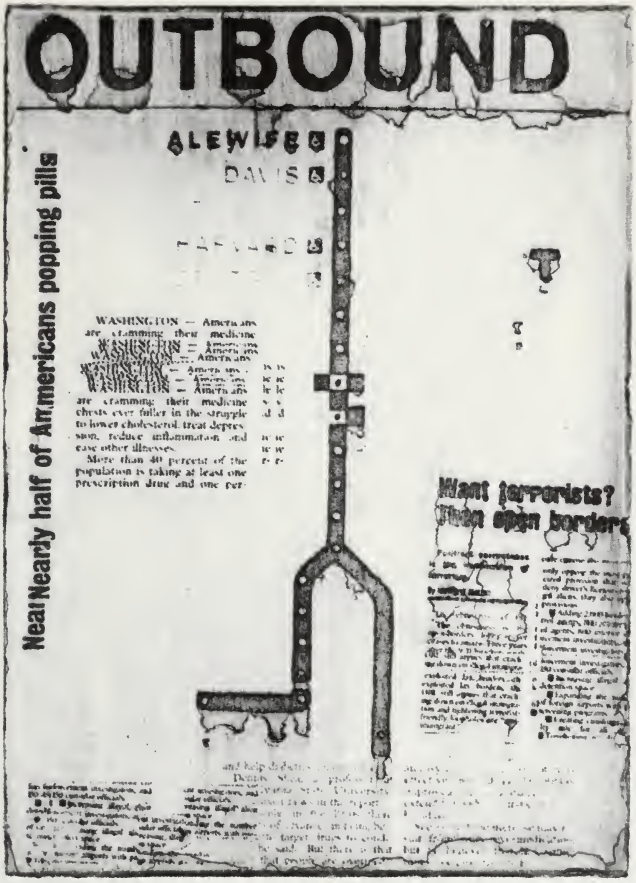
I eat my watermelon in the back yard naked because I am a messy eater, not because I enjoy parading my untanned girth in front of the local housewives, though the entire endeavor does have a strange sort of middle-aged men on mescaline-type appeal to it. I have not had a drink in three weeks. I think this may have had something to do with my almost purposely crippling myself before walking out of a dead-end job.

As minutes slide by, the rain begins to tap lightly against the shriveled foliage siding the house. It taps against the spindly trees with broad leaves that are as tall as I, it waters the sharp topped grass that spears my feet as I walk from the table to the kitchen. As I open the door a few drops land loudly on the skeletal tomato plants that have long since been abandoned to the summer drought. Before the door is closed the skies have been torn open and they seek to flood the earth with their tears.

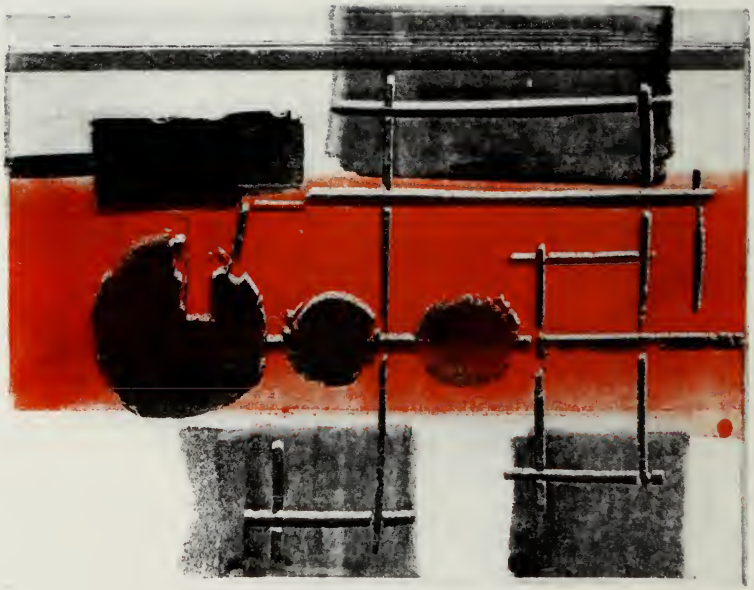
I close my eyes to imagine the view from one of the arroyos up the hill. The way the sky turns preternatural purple as the thunderheads mass. The moment before the first drop falls in earnest, when the clouds hulk and strangle the sun into single bright shafts, that is my favorite. The way I can feel the earth stretch toward the sky in those moments; if you stand in the bottom of an arroyo seconds before the skies open you feel like you are standing in the mouth of a man dying of exposure. The mountains like a tongue crackled with arroyos and silent before the rain.

I open them and I see the back yard. The rusted white lawn furniture that sits there looking like it never took the time to get properly dressed. The rain has brought with it the cool temperatures of higher altitudes and I shiver a moment from the wind and water on my skin, before going to the bathroom to wipe myself with a towel and then to the bedroom for clothes. I keep the bedroom dark, and even at midday it is barely lit. The walls are obviously lined with books and it is from one of these piles that I remove a pair of jeans and my shirt. The rain beats on the roof and has set a rhythm which I move to, consciously or not.

art



Jordan Colon
Outbound
Photo Etch



Jordan Colon

Untitled Yellow #352 | *Pan 865*

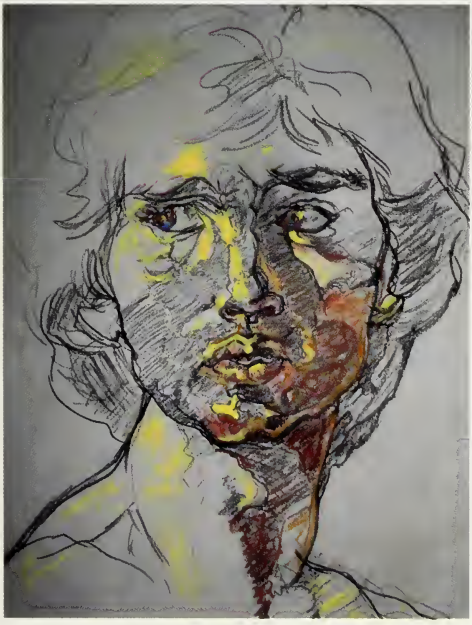
Relief Print | Aquatint/Monoprint

Zoe Ann Perry

Bowling Boy in Blue | *Heads for Sale, Cusco Peru, 2003*

Photography

Zoe Ann Perry
Amanda & Stacey | *London Pigeons*
Photography



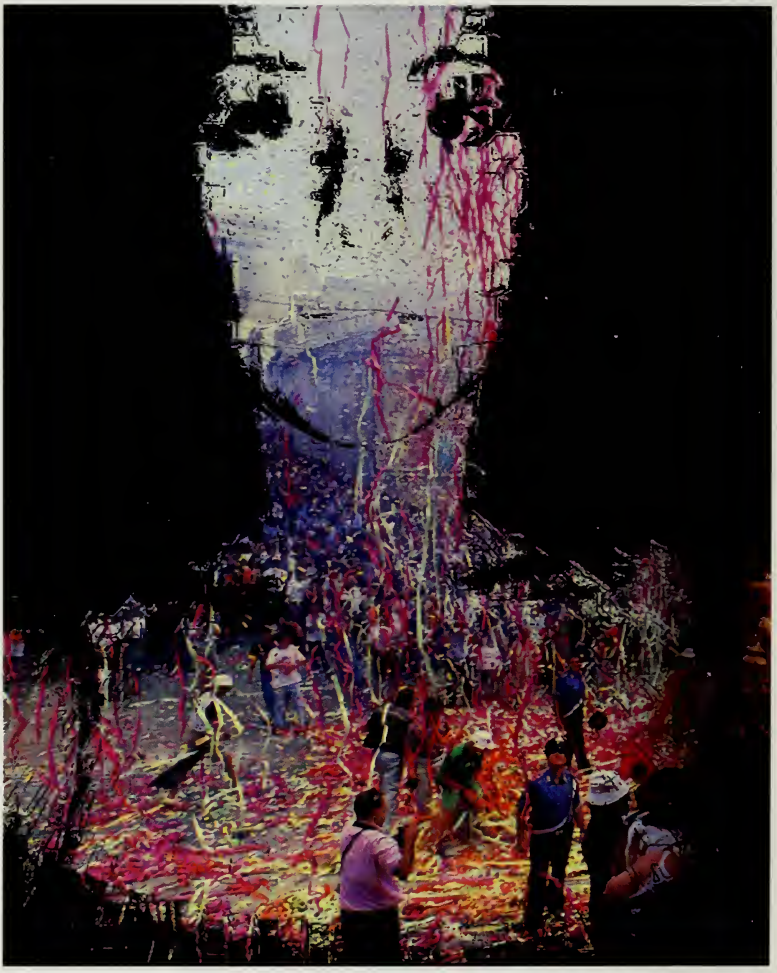
Clancy Chan

Pensive Girl | *Study*

Oil on Canvas | Pastels & Charcoal

Reginald Merome
Red Line | *Food for Thought*
Photography

Kate Sheridan
Birds in the Mirror
Digital Imaging



Kate Sheridan
Feast Day
Digital Imaging

Steven Osemwenkhae
UMass Milk Campaign
Photography

Shannon Kehoe
Untitled | *Self Portrait*
Acryllic | Photography

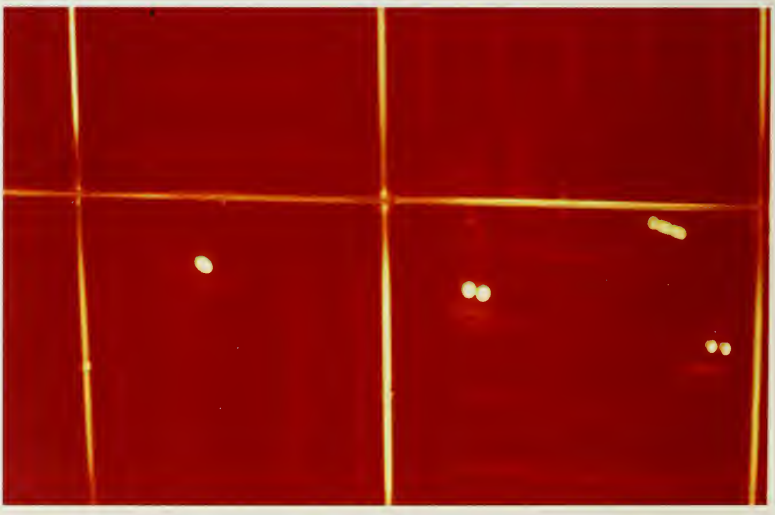
Yulia Dumov

Dream | *Goldfish*

Pencil & Water Color | Collage

Shelly Russell
Self-Portrait in Blue | *Untitled*
Painting

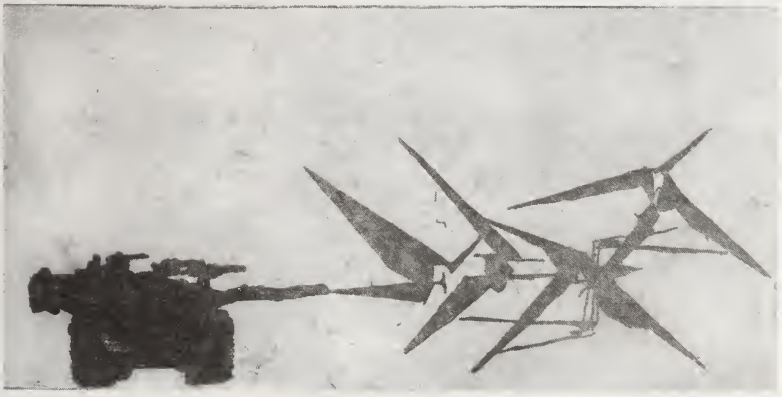
Elizabeth Mullin
Mystical Walk
Acryllic



Laura Trzpit
Steelworker | *Red*
Photography

Emily Taranto-Kent
From the Portfolio: "Transfiguration"
Monotype

Emily Taranto-Kent
From the Portfolio: "Transfiguration"
Monotype



Keith Hubert
War! | *Fear*
Printmaking

Keith Hubert
Forgotten
Photography

Paul Sung
Self Portrait
Digital Imaging

Negar Mortazavi
Ad Infinitum
Photography

Reino Carlson
James Joyce as a Young Man
Ink on Paper

Jillian Ferragamo
Homeless Fan (World Series '04) | *World Series Parade '04*
Photography

Audrea Laffely
Woman #1 | *Woman #10*
Photography

Maura Glasheen
Fine, Just Walk Away.
Photography

Jacqueline Waller

Illegal Arms Dealer Bangkok Thailand | *Salvage Boys Working, Bangkok Thailand*

Photography

Ludmilla Gomes
Sunlight
Photography

Muhammed Sillah
Eye of Essence 1
Photography

but wait, there's more

Alumni Work

As the University, the Watermark, and our students look forward to the future it's equally important that we keep ties to our past. By seeing what those who have come before us have accomplished we can learn about what we ourselves are capable of. It is with this in mind that the Watermark is proud to include our first Alumni Work Section.

In recent years many of our alumni have been recognized for the work they've done: winning major awards, publishing pieces and full books. In their time during and after UMass Boston our alumni prove themselves to be among the brightest, most talented, and most generous people in their fields. The community at this University fosters in each of us a sense of commitment to the world around us, a need to be involved and active, and to do our best to make the world a better place.

The alumni we've chosen to include to inaugurate this section are all respected and published poets. They are poets who have made an impact on the University during their time here, and have continued to be involved with our community after graduation. They are poets whose work is committed to the world, not isolated inside a poetic tradition but reaching out through their work to touch the lives of their readers. Their poetry has something important to say, and says it beautifully.

We are proud to be able to call these writers our alumni. They have already accomplished so much, and have only just begun.

Lori Byrne

Lori A. Byrne is a graduate of UMass College of Nursing (1995). A transplant to the wilds of Minnesota, she has learned the native language and customs, thanks to her husband Norm Oppegard and their son Avery. She is a Pediatric nurse at the Mayo Clinic, currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Health with the hope of specializing in global health issues.

A Mortal Death

I slipped out of my skin as though I were liquid
spilled into the dark caverns of Tartarus.
Aristeaus murdered me the first time,
my beloved Orpheus the second.
I should have seen it coming in the flight of bees
that shadowed me all week; my honeymoon.

My death came on a hillside path, met by the beekeeper
who greeted me with a friend's sweetness.
He moved closer as he spoke, reaching for me,
his hands eager, gray eyes flickering indecently.
I struck his hairless face and ran, slid upon
the tail of a sleeping asp and stumbled.

Now I reside in the damp catacombs of Hades.
Nymphs killed the beekeeper's swarms,
stole his wax and honey. My Orpheus is with me.
I will never tell him I am unhappy, knowing too late
that nothing can save you from a mortal death,
no blessed song, no prophecy of bees.

Long Night

When darkness came
our voices cracked with bitterness.
I left you pinching out the flames
of a dozen holiday candles.

I drove the neighborhoods
along the river, cottages
shivering with blue icicle light;
the glowing lamps of the sleepless.

Ten miles into the snowfields
I drove, memorizing the rutted
shadows, corn tapers and mangers.
The silhouettes of heifers gathered
steaming against the cold.

Two stars fell.
The first glittered and sparked,
the second faded away.
Two lives snuffed out
in this long night.

I want your hands
over my heart when I die,
the moment it burns free,
its smoke seeking stars.

Norm Oppegard

Norm Oppegard attended Umass Boston from 1992-1996, majoring in English with a creative writing emphasis. He now lives with his wife Lori Byrne and son Avery Oppegard just off the highway to Rochester, MN out on the edge of the prairie where he delights in finding hidden valleys and secret trout streams.

You Discovered Clouds Today

The crows draw my son's infant eyes
up to new spring leaves,
a flowing white framed within –
his gaze like a marine I once knew,
sick of war and missing home,
lying by my side
on a bunker in Quang Nam.

The clouds there were magical—lush, creamy, alive
flowing out to sea. They held us
moment after stoned moment,
focused speculation about the speed of light,
how long it would take a sixteen round
to reach Alpha Centauri.
You said each cloud was a gathering of souls--
mists of being, circling for their opening to return.

Our platoon slunk through a ville,
tired and wet under low fast clouds,
kicking pigs and ducks out of our path,
cursing old women and children.
You bent low a few yards away from me,
pulled intently in the mud.

I have never understood how you held my eyes,
your flickering gaze, then stillness--
mist burning off your body.

Perhaps you have returned now, held in my arms, forgiven.

Dreaming Yusef Komunyakaa

Barrell-ass on a John Deere tractor
Yusef Komunyakaa careens onto my dream screen,
hay swirling in a vortex behind him,
flannel shirt flaps against his face
set hard, eyes dead ahead,
hands rigid on the wheel,
front tires wobbling ninety degrees
back and forth in the harrowed ruts
of a dead field at dusk.

"Be careful," I cry.
the tractor spins full circle
front tires rising like a stallion's hooves,
gallops off, breath rising with the moon, vapor.

Rebecca Warner

Rebecca Warner holds an M.A. from UMass Boston and an M.F.A. from Bennington College. She taught previously at UMass and is the current Stadler Fellow at Bucknell University, where she teaches creative writing and serves as Associate Editor of *West Branch*. Her first collection of poetry, *Northwest Passage*, was published recently by Orchises Press.

Retrospective

She's backing through the door
unpacking bags as if she meant
to stay. What looks like rage
has melted to mere irritation,
bitter arguments to minor spats.
As for that bottle smashed against
the wall, like it never happened
though she can't explain
the way it sailed into his hand,
dented wall a miracle of fusion.

Wrong words fly into his mouth
like bats. "Twenty years of hurt"
count down to 19, 18, 17. . .
The non-malignant facial growth
he'd refused to have removed
has dwindled to an age spot.
He's a more attentive lover now
and lasts longer than he did at forty.
Their children are no more

than vague ideas. He slips a ring
from her finger, their vows become "Do I"
and it's the night they haven't met,
at the party of a mutual friend they're
standing in a doorway, smoking.

Poets' Market

Interested in narrative and lyrical poems in which cadence makes an important contribution to the work. No poems about pets, please. No poems involving the phrase "naked lightbulb" or beginning with "When." None with a litany of *how this, how that*; none using concrete nouns followed by abstract verbs. We hate getting poems from people who have clearly never read the magazine and advise writers to buy a sample copy. Gay male poetry welcome; however we reject all poems containing the following: "God," "Fire Island," "ice cream," and vicious putdowns of people in struggle. No racial slurs except in irony. Do not want to see religion, rhyme, silly stuff about butterflies or unnecessary sunsets. Childhood trauma a plus. Special interests: do not enjoy long poems, no profanity or sexual references disguised as flower imagery; romance o.k. Must–SASE, poetic insight whether free or structured. Manuscripts with excessive postage will be returned unread.

Dirty Girl

Believe I'm bitter, love.
When the nightsweats get me

you say only dreaming.
Cherish this:

my hairbrush
offered me a spanking.

Reach behind my eyes
and you'll find solace,

sweetness I've been hiding.
Teach me to

untie your shoes.
I'll take you like a

vacuum, you'll be cleaner
when it's done.

Interview with Franz Wright

Franz Wright was born in Vienna in 1953 and grew up in the U.S. Wright's most recent collections of poetry include *Walking to Martha's Vineyard* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) for which he won a Pulitzer Prize in 2004, *The Beforelife* (2001), and *Ill Lit: New and Selected Poems* (1998). He has also translated poems by René Char, Erica Pedretti, and Rainer Maria Rilke. Wright has received the PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry, as well as grants and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Whiting Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He lives in Waltham, Massachusetts with his wife Elizabeth.

Franz Wright's poems are at once concrete and unearthly, suggesting both a deep connection to this world and a meditative distance from its everyday happenings. His voice is profoundly intimate, as if he is letting you in on a secret or answering a question you have always wondered about. His sometimes haunting and deeply personal revelations are familiar, humorous, painful and transcendent all at once—in a word: human.

UMB Student Natalia Cooper recently had the opportunity to ask Wright a few questions about his work.

NC: I am wondering if you knowingly entered the world of poetry or if you one day discovered yourself in it after you had already started writing. I guess what I am really wondering is, how did you become a poet? When did you first start writing and what were some of the first things that inspired you to write or made you feel like you had to write? What about particular poets that inspired you?

FW: At the age of fourteen, I wrote my first poem, and shortly thereafter made a quite conscious decision that I would either become a poet or die. I do not recommend this, but that is how it happened to me. And I almost did die on a number of occasions, though that probably had more to do with problems with mental illness and my former active drug addiction than with poetry. But I meant to be a poet or nothing. I think that was rather stupid of me, but that's the way it was.

NC: I know you have also translated poetry. It is difficult enough to get one's own ideas onto paper but the task of rendering another person's words, and images and feelings, in a new language seems like such a mammoth task. You have said that rather than producing a mechanical English equivalent, when translating is done skillfully "an entirely new poem results." Can you talk a little bit about the process of translation? What was your most rewarding translation project and how does the

experience of translating inform your work? And I'm curious, have you ever translated your own work into another language?

FW: My own work has been translated into a number of languages, that I am aware of (Dutch, German, Vietnamese, Polish, I don't know what else) but no, I would not try to do it myself. As for translation, it is a separate art in itself, with its own demands. I suppose the most difficult and rewarding experience I have had with it involved my book of Rilke's lesser known works for the Field Translation Series at Oberlin College Press. I also enjoyed working on the poems and prose of Herman Hesse with my father [James Wright], back when I was a teenager. Rene Char was the hardest, but took me into a part of my own psyche I had not even been aware existed, a place of passionate and mathematical light. I don't know what to say about the subject. I don't do much of it anymore (and my wife is endlessly more expert at it than I am--really she is the one to ask about this) but I can say it is an excellent way among others to learn about how a poem is put together. Translating a poem is a bit like taking an engine apart and having to put it back together again so that it runs just as well as it did before you dismantled it. But it also requires the very same sorts of frustrations and moments of miraculous inspiration that the writing of one's own poetry involves.

NC: Much of your poetry, especially in your last two books, has included within its language a kind of personal relationship to salvation. Can you talk about how religion and spirituality have informed your voice in recent years?

FW: In 2000 I was initiated into and baptized into the Catholic Church, and clearly that has had an effect on what I write and my attitude toward writing. I have also exposed myself to and done some work with people in genuine affliction, the mentally ill, drug addicts, children who have lost a parent, etc. My impulse in writing has always been pretty dark and come from profoundly dark and lost and hurt places in my own psyche, so I think there is very little danger of my turning into a poet of life-affirming jubilation, but yes, it is certainly true that gradually—VERY gradually, and I am by no means out of the woods of Self yet—my attention has been drawn away from my so-called problems and outward toward those of others who have suffered in ways I cannot even imagine and hope devoutly never to go through.

NC: You mentioned that you have recently worked with mentally ill patients as well as with grieving children. Do you see a healing component in poetry, in reading the poetry of others, and through writing your own poetry?

FW: I don't know if there is anything particularly healing about being an artist of any kind (quite the contrary, often)—it is what I do, I don't know how to or really want to do anything else, so the experiences I have in my life find their way into what I write, inevitably, though not solely—I feel perfectly free to explore areas I have not personally experienced, and think it is nonsense to only "write about what you know." In fact, it can be dazzlingly interesting and fruitful to try, sometimes, to write about precisely those things you know nothing about, if you can do so with genuine humility.

NC: You have been writing for years, and your work has been getting more and more attention in the last five years (high book sales, finalist for the Pulitzer for *The Beforelife*, then awarded the Pulitzer for *Walking to Martha's Vineyard*). The poetry editor for *The New Yorker* said recently that you have gone from being 'a poet's poet' to reaching a broader audience over the last few years. Do you think there has been a change in your poetry that brought you a broader audience or does it just have to do with paying your poetic dues?

FW: There has been very little change in my work since the publications of *The Beforelife* and *Walking to Martha's Vineyard*, technically speaking, though I notice there has been a shift in content toward happier and more light-seeking thoughts and aspirations and the words that have come to embody them. And this has absolutely NOTHING to do with my more or less accidental "success." It has to do with profound changes in my personal life.

NC: I'm sure you get asked this all the time, but I can't resist the urge to ask you about process and craft. How would you advise younger poets who are starting out to help them to develop their craft?

FW: The only response to the problem of process and craft is to do it, try everything, and do it, daily, relentlessly, obsessively, and filled with hope and love for poetry itself. You must right away train yourself to consciousness that there are no poets, only instruments of poetry, and the only way to make yourself a good instrument of poetry is to practice your ass off. I think I should add that if you are really serious about being a poet and truly believe you were born to be a poet—unless, that is, you intend to make the writing of poetry into a sort of hobby, like doing watercolors of the Charles on Sundays—you really ought to prepare yourself for an extremely sad and difficult life, with little unnoticed triumphs here and there. There is no reward for writing poetry (and most definitely no financial reward) except writing poetry, alone, invisibly, in secret. And anyone who thinks they are going to cash the writing of poetry into an academic career will, unless they happen to be a stone cold genius (and there are very very few of those in any particular century) get what most people who do this get: comfortable mediocrity.

Franz Wright

April Orchard

We think if we're not conscious we exist
we won't exist, but
how can that be?
Just look at the sun.
Oh, if I could only make myself
completely unafraid—once
born, we never die—
what talks we'd have, and will. It's theorized
the universe is only one
among others, infinite
others. Though
didn't Christ tell us, "In my father's house
there are many rooms. . ."
And I would tell you
what it's like,
real fear. And
how there are human beings for whom the sun
is never going to shine
is never going to rise again, ever, not
really—
not the real sun.
They're not exactly waking up
in radiant awareness
and celebration of their own presence these days,
who'd get rid of themselves with no more thought
(if it were possible) than you would give to
taking off a glove.
How in deep sleep sometimes even we get well.
So you can believe me, in the far deeper
sleep (these new apple leaves, maybe) we are all going
to be perfectly all right.

The Only Animal

The only animal that commits suicide
went for a walk in the park,
basked on a hard bench
in the first star,
traveled to the edge of space
in an armchair
while company quietly
talked, and abruptly
returned,
the room empty.

The only animal that cries
that takes off its clothes
and reports to the mirror, the one
and only animal
that brushes its own teeth—

Somewhere

the only animal that smokes a cigarette,
that lies down and flies backward in time,
that rises and walks to a book
and looks up a word
heard the telephone ringing
in the darkness downstairs and decided
to answer no more.

And I understand,
too well: how many times
have I made the decision to dwell
from now on
in the hour of my death
(the space I took up here
scarlessly closing like water)
and said I'm never coming back,
and yet

this morning
I stood once again
in this world, the garden
ark and vacant
tomb of what
I can't imagine,

between twin eternities,
some sort of wings,
more or less equidistantly
exiled from both,
hovering in the dreaming called
being awake, where
You gave me
in secret one thing
to perceive, the
tall blue starry
strangeness of being here at all.

You gave us each in secret something to perceive.

Furless now, upright, My banished
and experimental
child

You said, though your own heart condemn you

I do not condemn you.

Walden

Sunlight and silence stood at a bend in the path suddenly;
wind moved, once, over the dark water
and I was back.
Far from the world of appearances,
the world of "gain and mirth."
So soon
there will be nobody
here going on
about death
and pain and change. No one here!
Spoking hallways of pines where the owl, eyes wide open, dreams—
there is a power that wants me to live, I don't know why.
Then I saw again
the turtle
like a massive haunted head
lumbering after the egg laying toward
the water and vanishing
into the water, slowly
soaring
in that element half underworld, half sky.
There is a power that wants me to love.

The Watermark is UMass Boston's student-run journal of arts and literature. Produced bi-annually it serves as an outlet for the highest quality writing and visual art by UMass Boston's undergraduate and graduate student body.

Submissions are accepted year round and are selected by staff members via a democratic and anonymous process with the overall goal of offering students an opportunity to be published. Information about submitting or getting involved can be found online.

The Watermark is supported primarily by student fees and is available for free on the UMass Boston campus.

For a donation of $15 for an individual or $20 for an institution we will send you that year's issues of The Watermark (2 issues).

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featuring an interview with Franz Wright

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